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SERIES

Star Bright

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T.S. DENISON & COMPANY

CHICAGO.

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April Fools, 30 min.	3	
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Case Against Casey, 40 min.	23	
Convention of Papas, 25 min.	7	
Country Justice, 15 min.	8	
Cow that Kicked Chicago, 20 m.	3	2

T. S. DENISON & COMPANY, Publishers, 154 W. Randolph St., Chicago

STAR BRIGHT

A COMEDY DRAMA IN THREE ACTS

BY

EDITH F. A. U. PAINTON

AUTHOR OF

*"A Prairie Rose," "A Burns Rebellion," "As a Woman Thinketh,"
"The Class Ship," "The Graduate's Choice," "Clubbing a Husband,"
"Wanted: A Cook," "The Commencement Manual."*

DEDICATION

Star bright, Star right,
Star of the Sunny Southern light,
Would that thou may, would that thou might
Accept the plot I weave tonight.



CHICAGO

T. S. DENISON & COMPANY

PUBLISHERS

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1915
STAR BRIGHT

CHARACTERS.

LEMUEL BRIGHT.....*A "Vile Worm of the Dust"*
WILLIAM WALKER SMITH.....*A Private Detective*
WALTER WILLIAMS SMYTHE.....*A Student from the "U"*
ARTHUR PULVER.....*Otherwise Known as WESTCOTT*
JAKE HOOVER.....*Who Proves to be Slow, but Sure*
PARSON WILLIAMS.....*A Friend in the Nick of Time*
HONOR BRIGHT.....*The Wife*
STAR BRIGHT (*Alias Madame Ormand*).....
.....*The Elder Daughter*
SUNSHINE BRIGHT.....*The Younger Daughter*
BIRD DENTON*A College Girl*
MELINDA BENDY.....*With a Love for Romance*

SCENE—*Mountdale, a Village in the Adirondacks.*

TIME—*The Present.*

TIME OF PLAYING—*Two Hours and Thirty Minutes.*

SYNOPSIS.

ACT I—Garden at the Bright Home. Late in the Summer. Morning.

ACT II—Sitting Room in the Bright Home. Afternoon of the same day.

ACT III—Madame Ormand's Room at the Bright Home. Two Weeks Later.

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JUL 29 1915

SYNOPSIS FOR PROGRAM.

ACT I—Jake makes a morning call. Bird tries to cure her disappointment by making herself useful. Smith receives a royal welcome all around the family circle. Sunshine and Bird exchange confidences. Smith solicits Bird's assistance. Westcott offers Sunshine a chance. Smith meets Sunshine. "I'm on the job."

ACT II—The wickedness of the world. A game of checkers with no prize at stake. Bird and Mrs. Bright discuss Westcott. Ethelbert Ferdinand Delancy's picture gives Bird an unpleasant shock. A faded dress with old-time memories. Smith confesses a fancy for Sunshine and furnishes a program of "canned music" with varying effect. "That voice!" Jake practices a little to strengthen his muscle. Westcott plays a trump card and the game seems to turn in his favor. Bird holds the joker and the game is saved. "Don't you folks want some light?" "You shall marry her!"

ACT III—Sunshine hears the true story of the lost Star. Madame Ormand selects her room and wins Sunshine's confidence. "The picture with its face turned toward the wall." "Just in time for the ceremony!" Smith and Smythe have a clash and Ethelbert Ferdinand Delancy is unmasked. "Cremating a has-been!" Melinda and Jake arrive at last. Westcott refuses to be a quitter. "Do your worst, Madam! I defy you!" The draping of the wedding veil serves to reveal the bride's heart. The divine purpose in a great sorrow. "This marriage cannot be. I forbid it!" Smith explains and Star comes into her own. College once more in sight of Sunshine. Bird introduces her real lover and all sunny dreams come true at once. Jake strikes a bargain. "Come on, 'Lindy!"

THE STORY OF THE PLAY.

The scenes of this play are laid in Mountdale, a village in the Adirondack region. Lemuel Bright, a pious, narrow-

mind "pillar of the church," and his wife, Honor, who is a college woman, had two daughters, Star and Sunshine. When Star was sixteen years of age she was sent to college, where, clandestinely, she met an actor named Arthur Pulver, who induced her to elope with him for the stage career she had coveted from her infancy. As a result her father disowned her, and for twelve years her name was never allowed to be spoken in the home; while the mother's grief over the father's attitude nearly cost her her life and condemned her to an existence of almost hopeless invalidism.

Twelve years after, at the time of the opening scenes of the play, this same man comes to the neighborhood under an assumed name, represents himself as an artist, and securing board in the Bright family endeavors to tempt Sunshine to leave home with him in order to secure the college career her father has always denied her, because of her sister's experience, of which she herself knows nothing at all.

The elopement is frustrated through the intervention of Smith, a private detective, who has come to the house as a boarder and been taken in by the different members of the family as the new minister, the new doctor, the new editor, the tax assessor and a phonograph agent, which is the rôle he himself has elected to play in the vicinity, as well as the lover of Bird Denton, a college girl, spending her vacation in the home, whose lover is a slightly different man with a slightly different name. In reality Smith has come to the village in the service of the absent daughter, Star, to prevent her betrayer from carrying out his nefarious designs against her sister. A phonograph record is employed to reveal to the detective the real state of mind of both the father and the mother regarding the lost daughter, who comes in person to the old home in the guise of a boarder just in time to prevent her sister from being forced by her harsh father into marriage with the villain, as a means of saving her reputation, which he chooses to consider endangered by the attempted elopement.

The detective then reveals to the astonished family the truth of the elder daughter's legal marriage, and all the

tangles are rapidly untwisted as the optimistic Sunshine is made happy by the promise of her longed-for college course, and the renewed joy of her mother and sister.

The comedy is carried by a neighbor, Jake Hoover, and his matrimonial designs on Melinda Bendy, a romantic spirit employed in the Bright home, not to mention the soulful Ethelbert Ferdinand Delancy, whose mythical personality, when finally unmasked, is a strong ally in Jake's cause.

COSTUMES AND CHARACTERS.

BRIGHT—Acts I and II: Neat dark suit of the retired farmer. Act III: Black suit for wedding. Make-up stout and imposing looking, about fifty years of age. Domineering and haughty of carriage and expression.

MRS. B.—Acts I and II: Simple house wrapper, white shoulder shawl. Act III: Dressy black silk with white lace cap. About forty-nine years old with hair prematurely white.

STAR—Very fashionable gown with all belongings in accord. Stylish wrap, picture hat, etc. She cannot be too elegantly dressed, as in contrast with the simpler apparel of the others. Wears dark glasses. Age, twenty-eight.

SUNSHINE—Acts I and II: Simple summer dress of any preferred shade. Act III: First entrance, simple house dress slipped over white muslin wedding gown. Second and third entrances, wedding gown very dainty and pretty, with veil, gloves, etc. Sixteen years of age.

SMITH—Acts I and II: Stylish suit, white preferred. Act III: Black for wedding. Free and easy of movement, jolly and lively. Age, twenty-four.

SMYTHE—Fashionable street suit. Very dignified and haughty of mien. Twenty-five.

WESTCOTT—Act I: Artist's velvet coat, dark red preferred, wide-brimmed hat. Act II: Light flannel suit. Act III: Elaborate black for wedding. Between thirty-five and forty years of age.

BIRD—Acts I and II: White duck suit, picture hat. Act III: Elaborate trained gown, but not to equal Star's in any degree. Age, twenty.

MELINDA—Acts I and II: Calico house dress with apron. Hair gray, in cork-screw curls. Age, forty. In last act as grotesque a dress-up as the fancy suggests.

JAKE—Overalls, old-fashioned straw hat, etc. At last entrance has attempted to dress up. He is about fifty years old, of the Uncle Sam style, chin whiskers, etc.

PARSON WILLIAMS—Clerical garb throughout, very stiff and dignified.

PROPERTIES.

ACT I—For Jake: Rake, bucket of nails, old straw hat, red bandana handkerchief. For Melinda: Basin, apples, knife, photo. For Smith: Cards. For Mrs. Bright: Book. For Bird: Hat and apron, hand-bag, with card. For Sunshine: Bunch roses, sunbonnet. For Westcott: Easel, sketch-book, palette, etc., cigars.

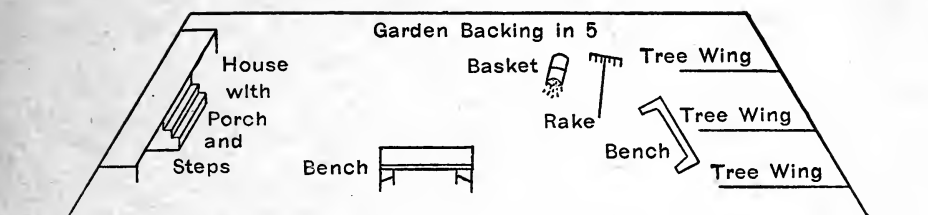
ACT II—For Mr. Bright: Newspapers and letter. For Jake: Stick and knife. For Sunshine and Westcott: Checker-board with checkers. For Bird: Book. For Smith: Phonograph, with records. For Sunshine: White silk dress, old-fashioned. Small valise. For Melinda: Photograph. For Mrs. Bright, Smith and Sunshine: White shoulder-shawl.

ACT III—For Sunshine: Photograph, handkerchief, veil, etc. For Star: Small grip with toilet articles, ribbons, handkerchiefs, fan, photograph, etc., books and magazines. For Smith: Magazine. For Melinda: Photograph, poker. For Jake: Armful of wood, magazine. For Mrs. Bright: Star's photo, shears, etc.

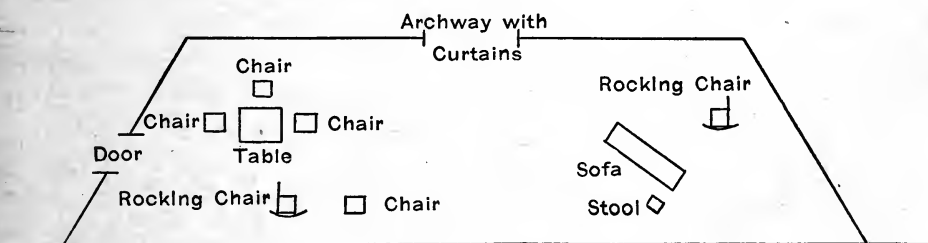
Other properties a part of stage setting.

SCENE PLOT.

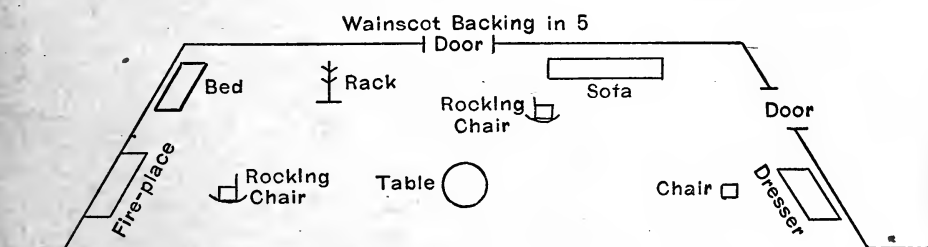
ACT I.



ACT II.



ACT III.



STAGE DIRECTIONS.

R. means right of stage; *C.*, center; *R. C.*, right center; *L.*, left, 1 *E.*, first entrance; *U. E.*, upper entrance; *R. 3 E.*, right entrance, up-stage, etc.; *R. D.*, right door; *L. D.*, left door, etc.; *D. F.*, door in flat or back of the stage; up-stage, away from footlights, down-stage, near footlights; 1 *G.*, first groove, etc. The actor is supposed to be facing the audience.

STAR BRIGHT

ACT I.

SCENE: *Garden at the BRIGHT home. Set house, with practical door, windows and steps, at R. Benches at center front and left side. Plants and flowers in profusion. Rake lies on ground near L. 3 E., and an overturned pail, with large quantity of nails scattered over the ground near it. Just before curtain rises a sound is heard as of some one falling heavily, followed by an ejaculation of pain and impatience. As curtain rises JAKE is discovered picking himself up from the ground and rubbing his knees, hips, etc., with wry face.*

JAKE. Wonder who went and left that rake right there in the path for me to take a tumble over. And great guns! Look at them nails! Must be a million of 'em! Don't seem's if I ever seed so many nails afore in all my life! (*Begins to pick up the nails and put them in pail with loud clatter.*) 'Tain't a bit like Lem Bright to leave his truck layin' 'round this here way. How'd he expect a fellow to walk 'round 'em when he's busy thinkin' 'bout something else? (*MELINDA, attracted by the noise, has come to window and stands looking out, smiling significantly and primping her hair, smoothing apron, etc.*) 'Tain't no funny job picking all these up, and whoever says 'tis is a gol-durned liar! (*Rubs leg, with expression of pain.*) 'Tain't very healthy for shins, neither! Wonder where 'Lindy is. (*Looks toward house and MELINDA draws hastily back out of sight.*) Guess I better see if she ain't got some arnicy layin' around handy. That stuff's powerful good for knocks, and that'll make a tip-top excuse for my comin' over this mornin', too. (*MELINDA keeps dodging back and forth at window, appearing and listening eagerly when he isn't looking and disappearing from view every time he turns toward the house.*) Sort o' firing two stones at one bird, as you

might say. Seems like I've been tollable sweet on 'Lindy for years and years—ever since Hannah left this dreary vale of tears for mansions in the skies. (*Pause, sadly thinking. Draws sleeve across eyes. MELINDA, watching, wipes eyes on apron.*) But, gosh! Scares me like thunder when I think 'bout tellin' her, so she ain't likely to ever find it out. (*MELINDA winks and nods slyly.*) Consarn a fellow anyway that ain't got no spunk! Every day since Heck was a pup I've traped over here in the hot weather and cold weather, the snow and the rain, calculatin' to up and tell 'Lindy just how doggoned crazy I be about her; but Jerusalem! Soon's I clap eyes on her with that shy smile o' hern, and them two eyes like pieces o' blue and yaller glass, it's all up with me. I just shut up tighter'n a clam and can't cough up a word to save my soul from sin. (*Straightens up, looking around carefully.*) There! Them nails is 'bout all picked up, I guess; but Jiminy! my leg ain't none the better for it. (*Pauses to rub leg, sitting bench.*)

MELINDA comes to door of house with pan of apples and knife, pausing in door to watch him.

JAKE. Love's like the measles. When you catch it the second time it's apt to be a worse kind than the youngsters have, and goes a mighty lot deeper in with a fellow! (*Sighs and lapses into thought.*)

MELINDA (*walks down to bottom step, looking all around, pretending not to see JAKE.*) Thought I heard somebody talking out here. Don't seem to see no one. (*JAKE rises slowly and comes toward her, but she walks around him looking off at different entrances and behind things, dodging him dexterously several times. Suddenly he stands still, and she, turning suddenly, meets him face to face in center of stage. She affects greatest surprise.*) Why, for the land's sake, Jake Hoover! How you do s'prise a body, don't you, now? Why, I was just thinkin' 'bout you. Ain't seen a sign o' you, you know,—since yesterday 'bout this time. (*Walks to bench, front, laughing teasingly.*) You look sort o' tired, Jake. Be you tired? (*He looks down, handling hat in both*

hands bashfully.) Better set down. I've got to peel these here apples for pies. Might as well talk to you as not while I'm doing it. (*Works while talking. JAKE walks around uneasily, carrying his hat awkwardly and looking out at all the entrances and eyeing the house cautiously as if fearful of being overheard.*) My tongue's working don't never hinder my hands a bit.

JAKE (*pausing at right of her and coughing bashfully, clearing throat, etc., getting courage to speak*). I—I—I just come over—

MELINDA (*looking up with apparent indifference*). Yes, I know, but it's just as cheap to set as 'tis to stand, and you'll stay 'bout so long, you know, anyway. (*Laughs while he backs to steps and sits, wiping face with bright red handkerchief. Then looks far off, dreamily.*) Ain't it just heavenly out here, Jake? (*He nods sheepishly, looking at her admiringly.*) Don't them clouds up there look just like living snowdrops floating 'round in a dish of bright blue ink or huckleberry juice? (*Pointing up.*)

JAKE (*looking up, puzzled*). I never seen no—

MELINDA. And don't they just make you feel like setting still all day,—(*He nods emphatically, looking up at her admiringly from under eyebrows.*) And just a-watchin' 'em, and a-listenin' to the birds singing away, way off, and dreaming dreams, and seeing visions, and—

JAKE (*rising nervously and walking uneasily back of the bench, eyeing her in perplexed way, trying to get out what he has come to say*). I—I—why, I guess so, 'Lindy, but I—I—

MELINDA (*innocently, continuing work*). I'm going to write a piece of poetry about it soon's I get it all thought out. (*Sighs.*) But dear me! I don't get much time to write these days, nor to do any dreaming, either, after five o'clock in the morning. (*Looks around at JAKE, who is pacing floor nervously behind her bench.*) What in the world is ailing you, Jake? Got something on your mind? Do set down and keep cool.

JAKE (*embarrassed, walks slowly to bench at L. and sits*). Just as you say, 'Lindy.

MELINDA (*turns to face house, thinking he must be there*). You see how it is, Jake—(*sees he is not there and stops in surprise*).—For the land's sakes! (*Looks all around, finally discovering him on bench L.*) Oh, there you be, eh? (*He nods sheepishly, while she shoves herself over to left end of her bench and turns to face him.*) I just want to tell you, Jake, there's a big lot to do in this old house since Lem Bright took a notion to take these summer boarders. Don't nobody get much time to set around and swap news.

JAKE. How many—

MELINDA. There's that there artist—Westcott, I b'lieve he calls himself—who's so mighty sweet on Sunny; and then there's that there college girl—Miss Dentist, or something like that—and Lem Bright told me there's another fellow a-coming this morning; and the Lord only knows how many more. I'm mighty glad it's getting so near the end of the summer, when I can snatch something like a vacation, too. (*Sighs.*) There ain't no rest for the wicked.

JAKE. That artist chap—Westcott, you say—I don't just—(*rises, walking around aimlessly*). MELINDA *keeps turning around to face him and continually shifting position while she talks*).

MELINDA. Neither do I—not a bit. And there's something about him that ain't just square, and I know it. He's too sweet on Sunny to suit me, too. But 'twouldn't do no use to talk to her. A girl's a girl, and there ain't nothing going to make a woman out o' her 'cept experience of her very own. And I'm just afraid Sunshine Bright's going to get it sooner'n she bargains for, if something don't turn up.

JAKE (*pausing directly behind her*). Speaking of Star—

MELINDA (*horrified, looking all around cautiously*). 'Sh! Can't you never keep your mouth shut, Jake Hoover? Ain't nobody speaking of Star nowadays, an 'tain't going to be very healthy for anybody who even dares to think of her around here. Why in the world don't you set down and act like white folks, Jake? You make a body so nervous. (JAKE *sits on step R., but MELINDA, busy with apples, continues to face bench at L., thinking him there.*) But poor Sunny! She's just got her heart dead set on going off to college like

that Dentist girl that's boarding here, and I do wish she'd get the chance.

JAKE. So do—

MELINDA. Goodness gracious! You're over there now, be you? (*Moves to other end of bench so to face him.*) Yes, Sunshine Bright deserves to get just what she wants, if anybody does.

JAKE. What be the Brights taking—

MELINDA. Don't ask me. They don't tell me none of their business. Lem Bright's mighty close-mouthed, as well as close-fisted, as you may have noticed for yourself. But ever since Mrs. Bright's been a-doctoring so much, the bills must o' be'n toll'able big, and the boarders'll likely help out a lot on the money end of it.

JAKE (*after embarrassed pause, trying to work his courage up to the speaking point*). Speaking of Hannah—

SMITH *enters L. 2 E., unseen by either, walks around, sizing up the place.*

MELINDA. Ain't nobody speaking of Hannah, Jake Hoover. Ain't nobody even been thinking of Hannah 'less 'twas yourself. I was just a-sayin'—

SMITH (*at C.*). Beg pardon, but is this the home of Lemuel Bright? (*MELINDA springs up, basin in hand, JAKE also rising and staring.*)

MELINDA. It is, young fellow; but you ain't got no cause to ask pardon for it, being as you're nowise likely to be to blame. Be you—

SMITH. Here's my card. (*Hands card to MELINDA.*)

MELINDA. Thank you. (*Sets basin on bench, wipes hands on apron and proceeds to examine card with great interest. JAKE creeps up and looks at it over her shoulder.*)

SMITH (*searching pockets*). Guess I have another. (*Hands card to JAKE.*)

JAKE. Thank you. (*Studies card.*) S-m-i-t-h.

SMITH. Yes, Smith—W. W. Smith.

MELINDA (*looking up*). 'Pears like I've heard that name somewhere before. Ain't you the new—

SMITH. Boarder? You've struck it. I'm the guilty one. I cannot tell a lie. Where'll I find the landlord?

JAKE. You mean Bright?

SMITH. I mean the boss of the ranch, whether he's especially bright or not. Is he around home?

MELINDA. You'll find him just inside the house there. You take him in, Jake. I've just got to get these here apples peeled for them pies. (SMITH *walks up, looking off at back, while MELINDA and JAKE speak aside.*) I'll bet he's the new editor of the *Banner*. The paper said he was coming this week, and it seems to me his name was Smith, or something like that. (*Sits and resumes work.*)

JAKE. More liable to be the tax assessor. Just 'bout time for him to be sticking his nose around. And his name was Smith, I'm sure.

SMITH (*looking off L. U. E.*). Beautiful scenery you have up here. That mountain over there—those woods—that little scrap of lake in the distance—an ideal spot for a vacation. (*Turns back to them.*) Many boarders?

MELINDA. Plenty.

SMITH. Fine place for artists, and—

MELINDA. Humph! We've got a plenty o' that sort, too.

SMITH (*interested at once*). Name?

MELINDA. My name's Melinda, sir—Melinda Bendy. (*Coquettishly.*)

SMITH. Yes, yes; glad to know it, I'm sure. But the artist—

MELINDA. Oh, he's Westcott—Arthur Westcott, he signs his name.

SMITH (*nodding with satisfaction*). Good!

MELINDA. Nothing to brag of.

SMITH. I mean—oh, well, did you say the landlord was—

MELINDA. Jake will take you in to him. (*Rises to make introduction, pointing with knife, while JAKE dodges.*) This is Jake, sir—Jake Hoover.

SMITH. Glad to know you, Jake. (*Shake hands.*) Now, if you'll show me—

JAKE (*giggling, speaks aside to MELINDA*). He's from

Missouri. (*Aloud.*) Come on, Mr. —(*Reads from card.*) W. W. Smith. I'll take you to Lém. (*Exit through door into house, followed by Smith.*)

MELINDA (*resuming seat with giggle*). Oh, that Jake! He thinks I don't know how crazy he is about me. Humph! Maybe I wouldn't have caught on if he didn't have such a notion of always talking to himself. It's a lot more'n he favors other folks. Jake ain't much on the talk when there's folks around, but let him get off alone somewhere and he tells himself all he knows—and then some. So, of course—well, I ain't deaf. I can't help hearing some things when I happen to be 'round. Jake's all right; but my! there ain't nothing a bit romantic about him, so far's I've ever been able to see. Now, Ethelbert Ferdinand Delancy—my! he's a different sort altogether. Such soulful eyes! Such a heavenly smile! (*Looks all around cautiously, then pulls photo from pocket and gazes at it.*) Such speaking features! Just like the gods that them old Greecy fellows used to write so much about. That poetry I wrote about him don't half tell it. If I'm ever so lucky as to meet that man—well, Jake won't—

BIRD *enters L. 1 E., wearing hat, carrying parasol, etc.* MELINDA *hurries picture back into her pocket and resumes work with air of great innocence.*

MELINDA. Morning, Miss Dentist. Been walking?

BIRD. Only so far as the postoffice. (*Walks listlessly about, looking discouraged and disappointed.*)

MELINDA. Ain't it a lovely day, now?

BIRD. I—guess—so. Why, of course!

MELINDA (*looking at her shrewdly*). I reckon nice days is all in a person's mind. Sunny says they be. When you feel good inside, everything's lovely. When you don't, nothing seems to look good to you.

BIRD. I don't know but you're right, Melinda.

MELINDA (*enthusiastically*). Gee! I sure do like the way you say that—"Melinda." Most folks say just plain "Lindy," and there ain't nothing romantic about that, is there, now?

BIRD. No, I—why, I guess not, Melinda. Do you think so?

MELINDA. Humph! She's got something on her mind, all right. Might as well talk to the pump, and do the pumping yourself.

BIRD (*trying to collect herself, walks back of bench and stands behind MELINDA, looking at her*). But you were saying, the weather—

MELINDA. Yes, I was saying just that. The weather—they don't have no such days as these nowhere else. Leastwise I never read of any, and I always read the *Banner* clear through every week, till I know it 'most by heart. The sun is brighter here, the skies are bluer, the grass is greener, and the air is sweeter than any other place in all the world. I wrote a piece of poetry about it once and they printed it in the *Banner*, and everybody thought it was just too sweet for anything.

BIRD. Well, there's trouble somewhere—

MELINDA. How do you know it ain't in yourself?

BIRD. I don't. (*Sits after looking all around and off at all entrances.*) I didn't see Miss Sunshine anywhere. (*Sits step, removing hat, gloves, etc.*)

MELINDA. Most likely she's trapping off with that painter fellow as usual.

BIRD. You don't seem to be very partial to Mr. Westcott.

MELINDA (*cautiously*). Well, I can't say as I'm plum crazy about him. I've seen pictures of men I liked the looks of a heap better. (*BIRD sighs.*) You don't look any too chippering, Miss Dentist. Anything gone wrong?

BIRD. No.—that is—er—no. Peeling apples?

MELINDA (*dryly*). No, frying fish.

BIRD (*laughs*). It was a foolish question, wasn't it? (*Rises.*) Can't I help you?

MELINDA (*amazed*). You?

BIRD. Please.

MELINDA (*looking her over critically*). But—

BIRD (*coaxingly*). I do so want to be just a little bit useful. I'm wild to "do something for somebody, quick!"

MELINDA. But that dress—well, I s'pose I can get you one of my aprons if you're so set on it. Most likely you'll cut yourself into pieces. (*Goes door. Speaks aside at entrance.*) Course she'll hinder a lot more'n she'll help, but she needs a job o' some kind to rub that sorry look out of her face. I guess I can stand it if she can. (*Exits.*)

BIRD (*sits bench C.*). Four whole days since I had a letter. I didn't think Walter would take me so in earnest. I wasn't really jealous, anyway. I wish—

MRS. BRIGHT *enters from house, pauses on steps.*

MRS. BRIGHT. Sunny! Sunny! (*Walks slowly down steps. Carries book, with finger between pages to keep place.*) Ah, you here alone, Miss Denton? I wonder where Sunshine is?

BIRD. She went out with Mr. Westcott, I think.

MRS. B. (*troubled*). Mr. Westcott? How long ago?

BIRD. Right after breakfast, I believe. (*Moves to L. of bench, making room.*) Hadn't you better sit down, Mrs. Bright? I'm afraid you'll—

MRS. B. (*walking to bench slowly*). Perhaps I had. I'm not good for much these last years. (*Sits.*)

BIRD (*looking at title of book*). What are you reading?

MRS. B. (*opening book*). Oh, it's just a little volume of Emerson. He's about my only consolation nowadays. When I was at college—

BIRD. Oh, Mrs. Bright, are you a college girl, too?

MRS. B. Yes, indeed. I was a college girl with just such ideals and ambitions as I see you have. How it has carried me back to those days to have you with us. My name was Honoria Nelson—

BIRD (*enthusiastically*). Smith, '85?

MRS. B. Everybody called me "Honor"—

BIRD. Yes, indeed. Why, the girls tell yet of the accomplishments of Honor Nelson. Shake for Smith!

MRS. B. (*giving her hand*). When I married—soon enough after graduation—I was proud enough of my new name—"Honor Bright."

BIRD. To think it's you—really *you*—I've heard so much about. Why, even the professors—

MRS. B. Yes, yes; I know. They made too much of me. (*BIRD looks at her protestingly and is about to speak, when she resumes.*) Well, I've kept my honor bright, Miss Denton, through everything; but it's the only thing about me that is still bright. Once I—but, never mind. Life's been too big a thing for me, that's all. (*BIRD looks down at L., shaking head.*) What's the matter, Miss Denton?

BIRD. Please call me "Bird." We're college mates, you know. I was just wondering why you, a college-bred woman, could so object to having Sunny—

MRS. B. (*stops her by a gesture*). Don't. It's not my wish. It's—it's—oh, I couldn't explain so you would understand.

BIRD (*looking off L.*). If Mr. Bright—

MRS. B. (*jumps up frightened*). Where?

BIRD. Goodness knows. Do sit down, Mrs. Bright. (*Assists her to resume seat.*) I was just going to say—(*sits while speaking*).

MELINDA (*in house*). Miss Dentist! (*BIRD jumps up again.*) Come in here a minute, Miss Dentist.

BIRD. Excuse me, Mrs. Bright. I'll be back—

MRS. B. Certainly. (*Reads.*)

BIRD (*in door*). Before I'd be so afraid of anything in the shape of a man I'd stay single till judgment day. (*Exits in house.*)

SMITH, after a pause, enters from house.

SMITH. That Jake said Mr. Bright was in there, but I'm blessed if I—(*MRS. B. rises as he descends steps, and seeing her, addresses her.*) Ah, beg pardon, madam. I'm looking for Mr. Bright. I am—(*hands her his card*).

MRS. B. Ah, Smith. (*Aside.*) The new doctor already. (*Aloud.*) I am Mrs. Bright. (*Sits.*) We weren't expecting you quite so soon, but I am glad you could manage to get here. I've not been feeling at all well lately. I am really afraid—

SMITH (*sits beside her*). It won't bother you to have me here for a week or two, will it? You see, I—

MRS. B. Oh, not at all. I think it will be much better for me to have you right here in the house all the time, close by me.

SMITH (*astounded. Aside*). Gee! Took a shine to the cut o' my hair, I guess. (*Aloud.*) I'm glad to hear it, Mrs. Bright. I—

MRS. B. My head pains me so much, and my heart beats too fast, and—

SMITH (*mystified*). Whew!

MRS. B. But I just can't take pills, or those nasty queer tablets. Please don't say I have to.

SMITH. Me? Should say not. I'd be in for firing the whole bunch of 'em out of the window instanter.

MRS. B. (*visibly relieved*). Oh, I am so glad. I was so afraid you'd make me take them, and—I've had to swallow so much medicine the last few years that—it is so good of you not to make me.

SMITH (*aside*). Is she out of her head, or am I? (*Aloud.*) Why, I never made anybody take anything in all my life, Mrs. Bright. I'm the most good-natured fellow that way you ever saw.

MRS. B. It's such a relief to learn that. I've dreaded your coming so.

SMITH (*amazed*). Now that's tough on me.

MRS. B. But now I'm so glad you're here. I'm sure you'll make another woman out of me.

SMITH. Whew! Some undertaking!

MRS. B. Yes, but, you see, I—I—

JAKE *enters from house.*

MRS. B. How do you do, Jake? (*Rises.*)

JAKE. Howdy, Mrs. Bright. I just come over—

MRS. B. To see 'Lindy, of course.

SMITH (*aside*). What in the world does that woman think I am? (*Walks L.*)

JAKE. Yes, but she didn't have much to say to me. She never does.

MRS. B. (*stands by JAKE at foot of steps*). She will, Jake.

JAKE. She either likes me or else she don't—one of the six. With that fine farm o' mine—and you know yourself, Mrs. Bright, there ain't none any bigger nor better about these parts—and the showy house and yard—gee! Should sure think they'd tempt any woman that knew a good thing when she saw it.

SMITH (*walks back toward them*). Back again, are you, Mr. Who—who—who—what's your name, anyhow? I meet so many—

JAKE (*uneasily*). My name's Hoover. But I aint got no property around here that's worth your looking at, sir.

MRS. B. (*to SMITH*). Don't you think I'd better go in out of the chilling air?

SMITH. Why, just as you think, madam, of course. Permit me. (*Gives her his arm and assists her up steps and into house, then turns back.*)

JAKE (*watching him*). Darn an old assessor, anyhow. They're always too blamed inquisitive.

SMITH (*returning*). You were saying—

JAKE. Just a few little acres o' land that ain't worth—why, ain't really worth five dollars an acre, sir, upon my word, and a ramshackle old house, not any better'n a hut—

SMITH (*puzzled*). Well, that's bad. Sorry for you, old chap. But I don't see how I can—

JAKE (*eagerly*). Oh, yes, you can. You can cut down a lot. Why, my taxes last year was more than the hull place was worth, sir. Yes, sir, they was—a lot more.

SMITH (*sympathetically*). Tough, wasn't it?

JAKE. Tough? Well, now, you'd think—why, just come out here, sir, and let me—(*attempts to lead him out L. 3 E.*)

MR. BRIGHT *enters L. 1 E.*

BRIGHT. Morning, Jake. And Mr.—(*looks at SMITH inquiringly, who fishes out a card and hands him.*) Ah! "W. W. Smith." (*Aside.*) That was our new pastor's name, wasn't it? (*Looks at him closely a minute, then extends hand.*) I'm very glad to meet you, Brother Smith. Thought it might be another week before you got here, but

the hand of Providence has been working for us, I see. I *am* glad to see you.

SMITH (*aside*). Everybody's giving me the glad hand, all right. I was never so popular in my life. (*Aloud.*) Well, I'm glad to be here, Mr. Bright.

BRIGHT. Brother Edgeworth didn't seem to suit us old-fashioned Christians up here any too well. He was too easy-like on the sinners. We wanted something more solid. We are just vile worms of the dust, and it doesn't become us to pretend to be anything better. I hope you'll give us plenty of hell-fire, Brother Smith. Plenty of brimstone!

SMITH. Why—why—I'll do my best. That's what I'm here for, I guess. But—but—

JAKE. Guess I'd better be jogging. You don't need to call to my place at all, sir. I ain't got nothing, I tell you. (*Shambles out at L. 1 E.*)

SMITH (*watching him off*). Not a very hospitable chap, I should judge.

BRIGHT. It's not for me to criticize, of course, Brother Smith, but I don't just like your clothes. They—

SMITH. What? These? Why, they're the very latest in New York. I thought them pretty swagger—

BRIGHT. Swagger? I don't understand. They don't seem quite dignified enough for your position.

SMITH. Sorry. I didn't bring a change, either.

BRIGHT. Not even for Sunday?

SMITH (*amazed*). Sunday? No. Didn't know it was the custom up here—

BRIGHT. You'll shock the congregation. They expect a certain amount of cloth—

SMITH. Why, I surely bought stuff enough—

BRIGHT. Just come in here, Brother Smith, and I'll try and make it clear.

SMITH. Well, I surely hope you can. (*They go to house.*) I—I—I—don't understand this place. It's the limit, right. (*Follows BRIGHT into house.*)

JAKE (*peeps in at L. 1 E.*). Has he gone? Gee! I'll bet he'll sock it to old Bright for all he's worth. (*Exits with chuckle of satisfaction.*)

BIRD *enters from house, wearing large apron.* MELINDA *follows.*

BIRD. This is such a strange family. Is Mrs. Bright always sick?

MELINDA. Always has been since—well, since I've known her. I ain't a-saying but what she has a right to be, neither, the way that man o' hers carries sail. (*They sit on bench, front, peeling apples.*) It's a wonder Sunny and me ain't sick, too.

BIRD. Why, I thought Mr. Bright was a very nice man—so religious, you know, and—

MELINDA. Oh, gracious! He's religious enough. He's got the church fever so bad that he sleeps with a Bible under his pillow and sings hymns in his sleep. But I've lived long enough to know, Miss Denton, that the most religious people ain't always the easiest people in the world to get along with. Not by a long ways. And Lem Bright is so set in his ways that you couldn't move him with dynamite.

BIRD. Do you think he'll let Sunshine go to college this fall?

MELINDA. Never!

BIRD. Why?

MELINDA. Just his meanness. Says big schools are a contrivance of the devil.

BIRD. How funny!

MELINDA. Well, I ain't a-saying anything, but—he's got his reasons.

BIRD. Always a mystery. One doesn't look for dark secrets and skeletons in the closet and things like that in such quiet rural places.

MELINDA. We find lots o' things in this world we don't exactly look for, Miss Dentist—Denton. I never do seem able to remember your name. Now there's Jake—

BIRD (*looking around quickly*). Where?

MELINDA. Oh, goodness knows. But he has to be considered. He's always hangin' around somewhere near by.

BIRD (*after a pause*). Mrs. Bright seems to be an exceptionally well educated woman.

MELINDA. Mercy, yes. She knows everything there is to know, I reckon.

BIRD. And Sunny is her only child?

MELINDA. Why—er—I—(*rises, embarrassed*). I—I—I think we've got apples enough for the pies now, Miss Denton, and I'd better get at 'em. (*Hurries into house.*)

BIRD (*rising*). How strange she acts. What did I say? Oh, I don't know. I'm liable to say anything today. Why doesn't Walter write? (*Laughter out L. 4 E.*) There comes Sunny. She is rightly named "Sunshine," bless her bright eyes. I couldn't endure it here the way Walter's acting if it wasn't for her.

Enter SUNSHINE and WESTCOTT, L. 4 E. SUNSHINE carries large bunch of roses. WESTCOTT, easel, sketch-book, palette, etc. BIRD meets them at center-back.

BIRD. How can you be so happy, Sunny?

SUNSHINE (*surprised*). Why, how can I help it?

WESTCOTT (*bowing*). Miss Bright knows how to find the sunshine bright in the heart of every shadow, Miss Denton.

BIRD. Well, we mustn't judge her too harshly for that, Mr. Westcott. Most likely she can't help it. But, Sunny, it's a crime to expect anybody born into this prosy old world to live up to a name like yours. (*To WESTCOTT.*) Any pictures? (*Peeps at easel.*)

WESTCOTT (*slightly confused*). Only a few rough sketches—nothing worth your looking at.

SUNSHINE. Why, I think they're just lovely. Show her the one of—

WESTCOTT (*hastily*). No, no. (*Carries easel, etc., to porch and covers it carefully.*)

SUNSHINE. A real artist is so sensitive about his work. (*Looks after him.*)

BIRD. And of course he spent his time looking at you and talking about—well, the weather, or something like that, and—(*smiles significantly as SUNSHINE looks down bashfully* *Speaks aside.*) Where have I seen that fellow before? I don't know any artists, I'm sure, yet every time I see him I have a fit of wondering. (*To SUNSHINE.*) What lovely roses.

SUNSHINE (*holding bunch to BIRD's nose*). Yes. Aren't they sweet?

BIRD. Ouch! Isn't it a pity that there has to be a thorn with every rose?

SUNSHINE (*laughs merrily*). Now, I've always been so thankful that there was a rose with every thorn. And, oh, Bird! (*Walks front.*) You just ought to see how they clamber up over the side of the house and hide the bleak, weather-beaten old boards under a robe of beauty. Of course, we know the boards are there, but we just forget it and enjoy the roses.

BIRD. You'd make anybody forget all the ugly things, Sunny, if they could have you with them all the time to keep them covered up.

SUNSHINE (*leads BIRD to bench L. and sitting with her*). Stay with me all the time, then, Bird. I'd love to have you.

WESTCOTT. She never asked me. (*Returns from easel.*)

SUNSHINE (*laughing*). Don't seem to need a brother. But a sister—how I have longed for one! (*Pause.*) I had a sister once. Her name was Star. (*WESTCOTT drops head and turns back, looking off up stage.*)

BIRD. Star? (*Aside.*) That was Madame Ormand's name. Could it be—

SUNSHINE. Yes. Wasn't it lovely? Mamma was a poet, you know, and she liked the swing of the "Star Bright." But—nobody ever mentions her. (*WESTCOTT looks back at them, frowns and walks off idly at L. 4 E.*) Mamma and papa will never even let me speak of her.

BIRD. Why?

SUNSHINE. All I know is what the old folks tell me over town. Everybody remembers her there and raves about her beauty. They say the young people used to call her

"Star Bright, Star Bright,
Fairest Star I've seen tonight!
I wish I could, I wish I might
Live forever in thy light!"

and rhymes like that.

BIRD. Where is she now?

SUNSHINE (*slowly*). She went to college—Vassar—and, I think—she died there.

BIRD. Died? (*Aside.*) Then it couldn't be Madame Ormand, though I'm sure there's a great tragedy in her life. (*Aloud.*) How sad! Do you remember her?

SUNSHINE. A little. I was only four when she went. She was about twelve years older than I, you see. But I can still see her bright eyes, her red cheeks and dark hair, and feel the touch of her soft fingers on my face as she came to my bedside to kiss me good-bye. Often, at night, I wake and think of her even yet, and I am sixteen now, you know. Mamma nearly died when it happened, whatever it was that took her from us. She has never been well since, and I dare not even think of Star when I'm with her and papa. He was very angry the last time I—(*suddenly checks herself and jumps up, turning to face BIRD and shaking finger at her playfully.*) But Bird, why are you so glum? Don't you know nobody has a right to be unhappy in this bright and beautiful world?

BIRD. Nobody could be if you—but, oh, Sunny, let me tell you. (*SUNSHINE sits again beside her.*) I—I—I—I have a lover!

SUNSHINE (*jumps up again, clapping hands*). I knew it! I knew it! I felt it in all my bones. Isn't it just lovely to be loved, loved, loved, better than anybody else in all of somebody's world? What's his name?

BIRD (*after searching handbag at waist*). Here's his card.

SUNSHINE (*studying card*). S-m-y-t-h-e, Smith. W. W. Smith.

BIRD. He pronounces it *Smythe*—long sound of "i," you know. He is studying law, and—

SUNSHINE. Um-humph! Same old Smith, though, isn't he? Oh, isn't it lovely? (*Dances again.*) All the world loves a lover.

BIRD. But wait, you enthusiastic child, while I tell you. (*SUNSHINE sits again to listen.*) We have had a quarrel.

SUNSHINE (*jumps up eagerly, looking all around*). Has he been here?

BIRD. No. Just a letter quarrel, you know. (SUNSHINE sits again.) I thought he was being too nice to another girl.

SUNSHINE (*reproachfully*). Oh, Bird!

BIRD. And I—I—well, I just told him so, as any other girl would, and—he hasn't written me a line for *three* whole days!

SUNSHINE (*with mock sympathy*). Oh, my! What a long, long time! Aren't you just pining away?

BIRD. You're laughing at me.

SUNSHINE (*astounded*). Laughing?

BIRD. Oh, well, making fun.

SUNSHINE. No, Bird, it is you who are making the fun. I'm just helping myself to my share. (BIRD rises and walks to R. indignantly. SUNSHINE follows, overtakes her just back of bench, front, and throws arm around her coaxingly.) Now, don't you go and be hurt by my teasing, Bird. It's so funny, when you know everything's so sure to come right.

BIRD. But I'm not so sure.

SUNSHINE. Can't you take my word for it? (BIRD looks down, hesitating.) Everything always has come out right, hasn't it?

BIRD. Y-e-e-s.

SUNSHINE. Well, isn't that a pretty good sign that it always will? (*Walks R.*)

WESTCOTT enters L. 4 E., watching.

WESTCOTT. She's a peach of a girl, all right, if she wasn't so infernally straight. A fellow's got to handle her with velvet gloves. Well, there's more than one way to get next to a petticoat, and I have never lost the game yet. (*Exits, watching over shoulder till well off.*)

SUNSHINE (*walks to BIRD, shaking finger playfully*). Answer me, young lady. Isn't it one of the surest signs there is?

BIRD. I suppose so—to you. All signs seem to come true to you.

SUNSHINE. Of course. Because I believe in them so much. They have to. (*Walks L., looking off L. 2 E.*) Let's

go look for four-leaved clovers and you can wish for your letter.

BIRD. I never find any.

SUNSHINE. I always do. I just feel them, somehow, calling me to the right spot. There's a new moon tonight, too.

BIRD. I'll be sure to see it over my left shoulder.

SUNSHINE. Don't you dare.

BIRD. You're born lucky. I wasn't.

SUNSHINE. Oh, Bird! Don't say that. You can't see even the biggest doughnut, you know, if you persist in staring at the hole.

BIRD. But when it's all hole—

SUNSHINE. It never is, unless you think so. Don't you think you're apt to find everywhere just what you get the habit of looking for?

BIRD. Didn't get my letter when I looked. Oh, Sunny, do you always get everything you want?

SUNSHINE (*still looking L.*). Always have, sooner or later, if I kept on wanting. Bird, see here. (BIRD *crosses to L.*). Look out there at those roses climbing over the trellis. Aren't they lovely?

BIRD. Um-humph!

SUNSHINE (*points*). See that big, creamy white one—at the very top?

WESTCOTT *re-enters L. 4 E. and walks to bench front, leaning over it and listening to girls.*

SUNSHINE. It's the prettiest one there's been this year—simply perfect. I can't possibly reach it, standing on tip-toe, and stretching myself up as high as I can. It's always away over my head. (*Leads BIRD back to bench L.*) Bird, that's going to college. I have never wanted anything so badly as that in all my life, and your being here has made me want it harder than ever. Sometime I'm going to have it. (*They sit.*)

BIRD (*incredulously*). How do you know?

SUNSHINE. Because I must. I couldn't possibly want it so bad if it wasn't meant for me. The white rose won't

always be too high for me. It will have to bend down, or else I'll grow up to it. (WESTCOTT *has listened with the most intense interest. Now strolls out L. 1 E. again, smoking a cigar.*) That's like your Mr. Smith. It's just got to come right, if you don't get over wanting it to. (*Rises.*) Now come on out for clovers.

BIRD. What's the use?

SUNSHINE. You mean, what's the odds? I read once in some magazine or newspaper, "Nothing goes out of your life except to make room for something better." I always keep saying that over and over to myself when everything seems to be going wrong. So, if Mr. Smith's gone, we'll just—just—hunt up Mr. Jones.

BIRD. Humph!

SUNSHINE. Don't like that name?

BIRD. Where did you get hold of all this sort of thing, Sunny? (*Rises.*)

SUNSHINE. Oh, just thinking. I've been alone a lot, you know, and the birds and the bees have taught me quite a bit. You must just forgive your Mr. Smith, Bird. If you can't forget him, why, of course, it isn't meant for you to. I'm going in and put my flowers in water now, and get my sunbonnet, and we'll go seek our luck. I'll wish for my college and you for your letter. See? (*Sings while ascending steps:*)

"I know the spot

In the meadow lot,

Where the four-leaved clovers grow."

(*Turns at door.*) You'll forgive him, won't you, for making you jealous?

BIRD. Maybe—for that. But—(*hesitates*).

SUNSHINE. Well?

BIRD. I'm afraid I can't, ever, for not writing.

SUNSHINE. Course you can. We have to forgive people or life wouldn't be worth living. No time for hard feelings. Put on your hat. I'll be right back. (*Exits through door.*)

BIRD (*walks to bench L. to pick up hat*). If everybody only had her disposition.

WESTCOTT *re-enters L. 1 E., looks all around.*

BIRD. Sunshine isn't here, Mr. Westcott. (*He removes hat and exits with low bow.*) He's got his eye on Sunny, all right, and I fear for no good purpose. (*Crosses to steps of house while talking.*) I don't trust him, somehow. He looks like—who in the world does he look like, anyway? (*At steps turns to look off L.*)

SMITH *enters quietly from house and descends step behind her.*

BIRD. I could probably remember if I wasn't so—so—so miserable about Walter. (*Jabs pin up and down in hat viciously.*) Plague a man, anyhow! (*Weeps.*) Oh, Walter, Walter! How could you believe me? (*Hears SMITH stepping behind her and turns to face front.*) No, I won't forgive him! (*SMITH dodges and looks frightened at her tone.*) I won't, do you hear? (*Stamps foot. SMITH dodges again and trembles in fear.*) Take this in the house and—(*holds out hat to SMITH without looking at him.*)

SMITH (*taking hat*). With pleasure, madam, but—

BIRD (*screams*). O-o-o-o-h!

SMITH. Don't be afraid, madam. I assure you I'm harmless.

BIRD. Pardon me, but who are you?

SMITH. Blamed if I know. Here's my card. Who do you think I am?

BIRD (*reading card*). Smith, eh? A new boarder?

SMITH (*flourishing BIRD's hat and bowing low*). At your service.

BIRD. You're the man that wrote—

SMITH (*with gesture of protest*). Not guilty.

BIRD. Your business? (*Takes hat from him, puts it on.*)

SMITH. Blamed if I know. (*Aside.*) I like her looks. I'll take her into my confidence. (*Searches stage cautiously. As he looks off L. 1 E. WESTCOTT looks in and they eye one another suspiciously. Then WESTCOTT disappears again and SMITH walks to bench, front, standing behind it.*)

BIRD *has in the meantime seated herself there, watching him curiously.*) Do you know this family well?

BIRD. Not very. *(Pause.)* Why? Do you?

SMITH. Well—er—not exactly. *(WESTCOTT looks in again, eying them.)* But they all seem to know me mighty well—and each one in a different way. *(Leans closer over her as WESTCOTT withdraws again.)* But you look like a girl who can keep a secret. Can you?

BIRD. If it's worth it?

SMITH. This is.

BIRD. Try me.

SMITH. I will. *(Looks around.)*

Just then WESTCOTT enters L. 1 E., looks around and walks out again L. 2 E.

SMITH. But, blame that fellow hanging around all the time. I'm afraid he smells a mouse already.

BIRD. Smells *what*?

SMITH *(walks to front of bench, to sit beside her)*. You see, it's this way—*(looks around as WESTCOTT looks in.)* Oh, blast it all, I can't tell you here. *(Rises.)* Come on in the house. Let's find a nice, quiet little place—

BIRD *(rises)*. I can't just now. Sunny's coming, and—

SMITH. Sunny? I haven't met her yet, but—

BIRD. You want to?

SMITH *(significantly)*. There's a reason. *(Looks L., nodding.)* And that rascal—

BIRD *(cautiously, on the alert at once)*. I see. Detective?

SMITH *(looking all around)*. Hush!

WESTCOTT re-enters L. 2 E.

SMITH. As I was just saying, I just love to sell phonographs. It's the one all-absorbing passion of my life. Lot's of money in it, too. All the people up here are just eating them up. *(WESTCOTT's anxiety is visibly relieved and he strolls back out L. 4 E.)* I'll go in now, and—er—look at the photograph album, if I can find it—I adore photographs, don't you? You follow when you can. See? And don't be surprised at anything you may hear and see. I need your help.

BIRD. Count on me.

SMITH. Put it there, pal. (*They shake hands. He exits in house.*)

BIRD (*walks back to bench L.*). What can it all mean? But there is a big mystery in this house somewhere, and I hope he can clear it up.

SUNSHINE *enters from house, wearing sunbonnet.*

SUNSHINE. How do you like it?

BIRD (*meets her at C.*). It's just too sweet for anything—except you, you dear child. But I can't go, after all, Sunny.

WESTCOTT *re-enters L. 4 E.*

SUNSHINE. Why not?

BIRD. Oh—why—I don't—I have such a dreadful headache. I must keep out of the sun. I think I'll go in the kitchen and help Melinda with her pies. You won't mind, will you? (*Looking back over shoulder at steps.*)

SUNSHINE. Not if it's what you really want to do most of all, Bird.

BIRD (*at top of steps*). Well, it is—I'm sure it is. (*Exits.*)

SUNSHINE (*at front bench*). Poor Bird! It's more the heartache than the headache, and a little real work will do it good.

WESTCOTT (*aside*). Wonder why I insist upon hanging around here, after all these years. Who knows better than I what a dangerous nest of hornets I'm stirring up? Well, it's the uncertainty, of course, that makes it so devilishly interesting. I'm too much of a gambler not to thoroughly enjoy playing the game, and playing it for all there is in it. (*Crosses to SUNSHINE.*) Miss Sunshine, do you really want so much to go to college?

SUNSHINE (*sits*). Oh, yes! yes!

WESTCOTT (*sits beside her*). And you can't give it up?

SUNSHINE. Why, I mustn't give it up. I must keep on wishing and wishing and wishing. If I wish hard enough and long enough, it can't help coming to me, can it?

WESTCOTT. Sunny, I feel that I can help you.

SUNSHINE. You? (*He nods.*) Oh, how? (*Jumps up eagerly.*)

WESTCOTT. Sit down again and let me tell you. (*She sits.*) It is quite right for you to go to college.

SUNSHINE. But not unless papa—

WESTCOTT (*decidedly*). Yes, even “unless papa”—

SUNSHINE. But—

WESTCOTT. No “buts” to it. Listen. I have loads of money, Sunny, just lying idle waiting for a chance to do somebody some good. You needn’t depend on papa at all.

(*SMITH descends from house cautiously, crosses to L. 4 E. and exits, unnoticed. He listens and watches slyly all the way across.*)

WESTCOTT. I can loan you more than you will need, and when you begin to earn for yourself, you can easily pay me back. There’d be no trouble about that.

SUNSHINE. But how—

WESTCOTT. Just pack your little grip and I’ll take you to my sister—a Vassar grad., you know—and she’ll see to everything. When you are gone—

SUNSHINE (*rises, horrified*). You don’t mean—*run away?*

WESTCOTT (*rises*). Maybe it does sound that way. But this is a time when the end justifies the means. Your father is unjust—

SUNSHINE. No, not unjust. We have no right to judge him. He must have his reasons.

WESTCOTT. Oh, but that’s absurd. He can’t have. It’s just a foolish prejudice some church people get into. When he saw you were really in earnest about it, he’d relent quick enough and forgive you—

SUNSHINE. But papa isn’t of that sort. I can’t, somehow, picture him as ever forgiving anybody. (*Walks up stage, looking at back.*)

WESTCOTT. But you, his only daughter, whom he loves so much—why, Sunshine, he’d just have to. And then you’d have your education—your fighting chance in the world—your “dream come true.” (*Has followed her, now lays*

hand on shoulder, speaking tenderly.) Sunny, I'd do just anything in the world to make you happy.

SUNSHINE. But could I be happy—that way? (*Walks to front again.*)

WESTCOTT. It would be right, Sunny. It is your duty to yourself to get all out of life that you possibly can. It is wrong to sacrifice your own future to a whim of—(*has followed her to front*).

SUNSHINE. Hush! (*Walks to L.*)

BRIGHT and SMITH enter L. 2 E. SMITH sizes up WESTCOTT, who eyes him suspiciously.

BRIGHT. This is my daughter, Sunshine.

SMITH. Ah! (*Shakes hands, then turns to BRIGHT.*) Is she your only child?

BRIGHT (*very emphatically*). Yes! (*Turns and exits L. 1 E. with great dignity.*)

SMITH (*watching him off*). Humph! (*Turns to SUNSHINE.*) I am glad to meet you, Miss Bright. Here's my card.

SUNSHINE. Mr. Smith! Oh, I am so glad you have come! (*Extends hand again.*)

SMITH (*aside*). Gee! Everybody seems tickled to death to see me. (*Aloud.*) Yes, so am I. So am I. I never got such a welcome in my life, Miss Bright. I—(*WESTCOTT walks uneasily around, keeping an eye on them.*)

SUNSHINE. And Bird will be so happy to see you.

SMITH. Bird? (*Aside.*) Even the birds are delighted when I come around.

SUNSHINE. I'm so glad you didn't wait to write. (*Archly.*) Bird was telling me all about you just a little while ago—

SMITH. She was?

SUNSHINE. I told her it would be all right.

SMITH. Of course.

SUNSHINE. I knew you'd forgive her.

SMITH. Sure!

SUNSHINE. She's so much in love with you, you know.

SMITH (*mystified*). Is she?

SUNSHINE. Can you doubt it?

SMITH. Not if you say so, but—

SUNSHINE. All girls get jealous streaks once in awhile—

SMITH. Oh, she's jealous, is she? I didn't know—

SUNSHINE. Oh, just a little. But she'll go wild with joy when she knows you are here. I'll go tell her. (*Starts toward house.*)

SMITH. Oh, but Miss Bright, I—(*SUNSHINE exits.*) Goodness! What does that girl mean? And who in the dickens is so crazy about me? (*Scratches head in perplexity as WESTCOTT walks slowly up to him.*)

WESTCOTT (*offering cigar*). Have a cigar? My name's Westcott.

SMITH (*accepts cigar, lighting it, etc.*). Westcott, eh? Now where have I seen you before? (*WESTCOTT looks confused.*) Here's my card.

WESTCOTT (*with card*). Smith. Name sounds familiar. Looking for board?

SMITH. Thought I was. But everybody here seems to have a different idea of my mission to this vicinity. I seem to be the long-looked-for-and-longed-for Something or Other to every man, woman and child. I—you see, I sell phonographs, and wanted to canvass around here, but—(*shakes head.*)

WESTCOTT (*visibly relieved*). Phonographs?

SMITH. Talking machines, you know. Biggest thing I ever struck. Why, I—

MELINDA (*running down steps, eagerly*). I'm just awfully glad you've come to run the *Banner*, Mr. Smith. It sure did need a new hand at it.

SMITH. *Banner*? What in Sam Hill—(*aside*). Wonder if she's the bird?

MELINDA. I've writ a lot of poetry and I'll read you some as soon as I get time after dinner. I feel certain you'll want to use some of it every week.

SMITH (*aside*). Wonder what for?

MELINDA. 'Tain't everybody, you know, that can write poetry.

SMITH (*aside*). Thank heaven for that.

MRS. B. (*at window*). Melinda!

MELINDA. Yes'm. (*Starts up steps. At door, aside.*)
If Ethelbert Ferdinand DeLancy could only see my poetry.
(*Exits in house.*)

SMITH (*staring after her*). Mighty kind of her.

JAKE *enters L. 1 E. and shambles across to SMITH.*

JAKE. I ain't got hardly a thing worth taxing, Mr. Smith.

WESTCOTT. I suppose you find a ready sale for—

SMITH (*not paying attention to either*). This is surely a *bright* family, or else my polish is rubbing off. (*Turns to men.*) Excuse me, gentlemen. I have to send a telegram. (*Starts L.*)

WESTCOTT. More machines? (*SMITH halts and looks at him curiously.*)

SMITH. What? —er—(*after slight hesitation grasps at the idea.*) Oh, yes, yes; of course. Big sale for 'em up here. Everybody's doing it. Buying, buying, buying. (*Starts L.*)

JAKE (*turns to follow him*).—Speaking of women—

SMITH. Wasn't anybody speaking of women, my friend, but—

JAKE. But the taxes—

MRS. B. (*at window*). Doctor Smith! I—(*SMITH whirls to face her.*)

BRIGHT (*hurrying in L.*). I forgot to tell you, Elder, that—(*SMITH whirls to face him.*)

MELINDA (*at door R.*). Oh, Mr. Smith, about that poetry—(*SMITH whirls to R.*)

JAKE (*at L.*). I shan't pay no more taxes than—(*SMITH whirls to L.*)

SUNSHINE (*at door, pushing MELINDA aside*). Here he is, Bird—right out here. Never mind your hair. Come on. (*BRIGHT and JAKE exit R. WESTCOTT, L. All look puzzled.*)

SMITH (*turning to face R.*). Who in the dickens am I? (*BIRD pulls SUNSHINE back, and SMITH, alone, walks down, soliloquizing.*) Now, you look here, William Walker

Smith, if all these various opinions do not lead you to forget just who you are yourself, and what you're here for; you've been sent to this house to do a big work, and you've got to keep your head, and figure your columns straight. (*WESTCOTT looks in and draws back L. as he catches SMITH's eye.*) That Westcott's the man, and here's just the chap to tell him so when the right time comes. But hold your horses, Smith, till you're perfectly sure of his game. Don't kick over the pail until you're sure you've got all the milk. Then just produce your queen of clubs and prove yourself the winner while the bell rings for—

MELINDA (*comes to door, ringing bell loudly*). Dinner! Dinner!

SUNSHINE (*at window*). Come, Mr. Smith.

SMITH (*emphatically, starting to house*). I'm on the job, (*Exits.*)

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

SCENE: *Sitting-room at the BRIGHT home. Full stage. Table with three chairs near R. 3 E. Practical door at R. 2 E. Rocker with straight chair near R. front. Archway with curtains at center back. Lounge diagonally across at L. Hassock at foot of lounge. Rocker at head.*

At rise, discovered SUNSHINE and WESTCOTT, *playing checkers at table. SUNSHINE L. of table, WESTCOTT R. SMITH looking over SUNSHINE'S shoulder, watching the game. MRS. B. lies on lounge at L, with BIRD sitting on hassock beside her, reading book. BRIGHT in rocker at right front, reading newspaper. JAKE in chair near him, whittling a stick absently. Time represented, late afternoon.*

BRIGHT (*after reading silently a little, lays down paper and removes glasses*). There doesn't seem to be anything in the papers these days but sin and wickedness. The world's getting worse and worse every day. I don't know what we're coming to.

BIRD. Oh, the world looks good to me, Mr. Bright. It's the people that's out of joint.

WESTCOTT. Your move, Miss Sunshine.

SUNSHINE (*studying board*). I know, but—

SMITH (*watching board*). He seems to be getting you cornered all right.

SUNSHINE (*after intent pause, moves triumphantly*). There, now; jump. Oh, I'm sure everybody's doing the very best he knows how.

BRIGHT. Now that's nonsense, Sunny. Look at the jails and State's prisons chock full o' people. Do you mean to say they don't know any better than to do the things they do? Bosh!

WESTCOTT. I agree with you, Mr. Bright. We're all a bad lot, and the worst of it is that we don't seem to care how bad we are. Anyhow, most men would rather be called a villain than a fool. (*Business of moving.*) Crown, please.

SUNSHINE. You surely *can* play checkers, Mr. Westcott.

WESTCOTT. Oh, I know a move or two in more than one game. Now, I'll bet a dollar—

BRIGHT (*rising in quick alarm*). No, you won't, young man. You won't bet a penny in this house. It's against my principles—a device of the devil, entirely.

WESTCOTT (*rising*). I beg your pardon, Mr. Bright. I didn't really mean it, you know. It's just a common phrase—

BRIGHT. Altogether too common nowadays in these parts. (*Turns away with a grunt.* WESTCOTT resumes seat.)

JAKE (*looking up absently*). Speaking of dogs—

BRIGHT. Nobody's been speaking of dogs, Jake, so far as I've heard. I was talking of betting and gambling, and—

JAKE (*hastily*). Yes, yes. I—I was thinking of something else.

BRIGHT. Vile worms of the dust that we are, we can't—

SMITH (*walks to him, slapping him on shoulder briskly.* BRIGHT winces). Oh, come now, old man. Just cut that stuff out. Of course, if you insist upon being a worm, no

man living's going to dispute your perfect right to be one if it pleases you, but don't you expect the rest of us fellows to crawl along in the mud with you, for we're not built that way.

BRIGHT (*shocked*). You talk like this, sir? You? You? Why, I can't understand. I—(*shakes head and turns to JAKE, bewildered.*) Shall we go out to the barn and take a look at the stock, Jake? (SMITH resumes position behind SUNSHINE.)

JAKE. Eh? What? I was thinking about something else.

BRIGHT. Want to take a look around the barn?

JAKE (*rising*). Don't care if I do. (*Crosses to SMITH.*) When you want to size up my property, young fellow, why, I'll likely be 'round someplace. But 'tain't worth your trouble—

SMITH. Yes, yes; I understand. I don't want to buy any—

BRIGHT. Think you'd like to go 'long, Brother Smith?

SMITH. Who? Me? Why—er—(*looks from BRIGHT to WESTCOTT, hesitating.*) Yes, I believe I will, thank you.

SUNSHINE (*looks over shoulder*). Bird, remember what I said.

BIRD. I'm remembering. (SUNSHINE *nods to her emphatically and then indicates SMITH with a nod.* BIRD *shakes head firmly.* SMITH *intercepts glance and looks puzzled.* WESTCOTT *watches jealously, not understanding.* At entrance SMITH looks back over shoulder, first at SUNSHINE, then at BIRD, shaking head in bewilderment as he follows men out door R.)

SUNSHINE (*reproachfully*). Why didn't you go with him, Bird?

BIRD. He didn't ask me. (SUNSHINE *shakes head and returns to game.*)

SUNSHINE. Two jumps and a king for me, Mr. Westcott. You're not attending to business.

WESTCOTT (*moving as indicated*). It's a bum old game, anyway—a kid's plaything. If we had some cards now—

SUNSHINE (*shocked*). Oh, don't mention cards here. Papa thinks it's wicked to even think of them.

WESTCOTT. Such bosh, you know—all that stuff. I believe it's your move.

SUNSHINE. Checkers are all-right for me, anyway. I can get a great deal of amusement out of little things. Besides, it's like everything else. You have to keep your eyes open and attend to your own business, or—

WESTCOTT. The other fellow gets the prize.

SUNSHINE. But there's no prize at stake in our little game.

WESTCOTT. Then why not let there be one?

SUNSHINE. Dare we? (*Looks all around cautiously. BIRD and MRS. B. are conversing in dumb show.*) Then, what?

WESTCOTT (*taking her hand as it lies on the table and holding it up.*) This.

SUNSHINE. I don't—understand. Oh, you mean—you surely don't mean—

WESTCOTT (*tenderly*). Yes.

SUNSHINE. But that wouldn't be worth even a game of checkers if you won without the heart.

WESTCOTT. Then stake that, too.

SUNSHINE (*drawing her hand away*). Papa wouldn't approve of playing for prizes. Besides—(*studies board, making quick move*) there! I've cornered you. You see you have lost the game while disputing about the stake.

WESTCOTT (*rises hastily, brushing checkers to floor with sleeve*). True, Miss Sunshine, I have lost the game—(*aside*) of checkers. (*Stoops over to pick up checkers, SUNSHINE assisting. Speaks aloud.*) It isn't the first time a man has surrendered to a woman. (*Rises, walking to door R. At door turns back.*) Wouldn't you like to take a stroll over to the postoffice, Miss Sunshine?

SUNSHINE (*hesitates, troubled over recent conversation*). Not just now, I think, Mr. Westcott. I have several little things to attend to.

WESTCOTT. Bye-and-bye, perhaps?

SUNSHINE. Maybe. (*Turns from him and walks toward lounge.*)

WESTCOTT (*at door, aside*). Gee, but she's devilish par-

ticular. But I'm not sure it doesn't rather whet a fellow's appetite. I'll have her yet, or my name's not Westcott. (*Smiles significantly.*) And that's no joke, either. (*Exits door R.*)

SUNSHINE (*sits rocker behind lounge*). I'm so sorry you're not feeling better today, mamma.

MRS. B. Oh, I'm all right, Sunny. I don't know that I'm feeling any worse than usual.

SUNSHINE. Why did you let him go out alone, Bird?

BIRD (*puzzled*). Him? (*Suddenly understands.*) Oh, yes—him. Why, I—I—I thought he was plenty old enough to take care of himself.

SUNSHINE. Humph! (*Meditatively.*)

MRS. B. Sunny.

SUNSHINE (*instantly alert*). Yes, mamma.

MRS. B. You know that small telescope at the left end of the third shelf in my closet—on the east side, you know?

SUNSHINE. The leather one, mamma, or the—

MRS. B. Yes, the leather. In it you will find an old-fashioned white silk dress. I wish you would bring it down to me.

SUNSHINE (*jumping up*). Of course. (*Starts out C. At door turns back.*) If he comes back, Bird, be good to him. (*BIRD tosses head, SUNSHINE shakes finger at her warningly. Exits.*)

MRS. B. Dear Sunny! She just seems to make a business of being happy. I used to be that way, too. I hope her spirit will never have to be crushed to the earth as mine has been. (*Pause.*) This Mr. Westcott—do you like him, Bird?

BIRD. I can't honestly say that I do, Mrs. Bright. I don't know why, either, but there's something about him—well, I just don't trust him, that's all.

MRS. B. There's a familiar look about him sometimes that puzzles me. I feel as though there was some unpleasant memory struggling to assert itself, but it baffles me. I can't remember ever having seen him before.

BIRD. He's a peculiar fellow.

MRS. B. I can't feel easy about him, some way. I've

always been so afraid that something awful would happen to Sunny, and now I'm just worried half to death all the time if a man even looks at her.

BIRD (*turns away and sighs*). They're not very trustworthy—any of the bunch. That's my experience.

MRS. B. Mr. Bright gets very angry if I speak to him about it. He says she's old enough to take care of herself, and if she don't, she deserves to go straight to the devil; but—I'm so afraid—I can't sleep nights, sometimes.

BIRD. Is she your only child?

MRS. B. I fear so—yes, I—

MELINDA *enters C., looking at picture.*

MELINDA. Ethelbert Ferdinand DeLancy! If that ain't a sweet name, then I never heard no poetry. It don't seem to me that anybody in the world could see any romance in a common, every-day name like Jake! (*Looks up, slips picture in pocket and looks all around room.*) Ain't Jake in here? Thought I saw him moseying along this way again.

BIRD (*rising*). He went out to the barn with Mr. Bright, Melinda. Did you want him? (*Walks up to her. They stand at table.*)

MELINDA (*confidentially*). Well, you see, I ain't never felt just sure about that. You see, I'm just crazy about another fellow—

BIRD. You are?

MELINDA (*nods bashfully, then turns to MRS. B.*). We ain't bothering you with our talking, be we, Mrs. Bright?

MRS. B. Oh, not at all, 'Lindy.

MELINDA. You see this other fellow's a right swell city fellow—

BIRD. Fine feathers don't always make fine birds, Melinda.

MELINDA. They help a lot, just the same. And he's so pretty, and so smart and romantic looking. I'll show you his picture. (*Takes photo from pocket, wipes it on apron and displays it proudly.*) There! Ain't he a daisy?

BIRD (*starts in horror*). Him? (*Aside.*) Heavens! It's

Walter himself! (*Aloud.*) Where did you get that picture, Melinda?

MELINDA (*embarrassed, but with dignity*). I ain't supposed to tell that, Miss Denton. I came honestly by it.

BIRD (*aside, walking back to lounge*). Oh, Walter! Walter! What can this mean?

MELINDA (*aside, watching BIRD in amazement*). Humph! Seems to bother her some way. Guess she don't like his looks. Well, she don't have to. Bet she's jealous. He's a heap better looking than that Smith editor-fellow that Sunshine says she's so sticky on. He don't seem to be acting so very wild about her. If Ethelbert Ferdinand DeLancy wasn't any more romantic looking than that chump I think I'd quit laying awake at night to think about him. (*Exits C.*)

MRS. B. What's the matter, Bird?

BIRD (*dropping to hassock and resting head in hands*). Oh, nothing.

MRS. B. Aren't we women amusing? We laugh and say, "Oh, nothing!" when our hearts are fairly breaking, and then, when we are happiest, what do we do but cry like little babies? (*Pause.*) Tell me, Bird.

BIRD (*raising head, looking C. door*). Sunshine's coming. But there's not a thing to tell, anyway.

SUNSHINE *enters C., carrying dress.*

SUNSHINE. Is this it, mamma?

MRS. B. (*sits up eagerly*). Yes, dear. Bring it here and—

BIRD. Oh, how dear and quaint.

MRS. B. It was my graduating dress. I somehow felt I wanted you girls to see it today. My mother made it—every stitch.

BIRD. She did? (*Examines work.*) What exquisite hand-work.

SUNSHINE (*fingering it tenderly*). Dear old grandma.

MRS. B. (*reminiscently*). Often she would say, "Honor, I am sewing into every seam so many hopes and dreams, and such wonderful plans for your happiness. I want you

always to feel that you must live up to this dress, for with all the big thoughts I have sewn into it, it must mean much to all your life. Every tiny stitch is a thought; every knot, a prayer."

SUNSHINE. Just like her.

BIRD. How perfectly grand!

MRS. B. Wasn't it? And, girls, often when I would be tempted to do this or that, or to complain a little, perhaps, of some petty disappointment, I would remember that I just had to live up to that dress, and it was such a help to me.

BIRD. It must have been.

SUNSHINE. Of course.

MRS. B. I was married in it, too, that I might thus carry all the hopes and dreams and ideals into my larger, broader life.

SUNSHINE (*sits*). Why did you never show it to me before, mamma?

MRS. B. (*smoothing her hair*). I don't really know, dear. Who can ever say in this queer world just why he does a thing or does not do it? Perhaps the time had not yet come. (*Bows head in hands.*) Sunny, when I die will you see that I am buried in the old gown, that I may show mother how hard I tried to live up to it all these years? Maybe I'll find some of the old ideals waiting for me over there. Who knows?

SUNSHINE. Why, of course I will, mamma, if I am still living when that time comes. But you mustn't think about death now, but about life. You have a great deal to do for us all yet before you can leave us.

BIRD. And you are such a young woman—in spite of this lovely white hair.

MRS. B. Nearly fifty, in years, Bird, and sometimes it seems like that many centuries since I was a college girl like you. Come up to my room with me and let me show you some of my books and souvenirs. They haven't been out of my trunk for years.

BIRD. Let me help you. (*Assists her to rise and they exit C. slowly.*)

MRS. B. (*over shoulder at entrance*). Put the old gown back in its place, Sunny, and then come into my room. (*Exits.*)

SUNSHINE. Yes, mamma. (*Folds gown thoughtfully and carefully. Sighs. Starts out C. slowly.*)

SMITH *re-enters R.*

SMITH. "Whither away so fast, fair maiden?

Whither away so fast, I say?"

SUNSHINE (*turning back*). Do I seem in a rush? I didn't—(*hesitates, then resolutely speaks her mind*). Oh, Mr. Smith! Bird isn't really angry with you, you know.

SMITH. Isn't she? Glad to hear it, I'm sure.

SUNSHINE. No, indeed, she isn't. She's just as fond of you as she can be.

SMITH. Delighted, I'm sure.

SUNSHINE. She—she—well, you know you really shouldn't flirt with other girls.

SMITH. Not guilty!

SUNSHINE. And Bird's proud and likes to be coaxed. Wouldn't you—couldn't you, please coax her a little?

SMITH. Me? Coax? Maybe I could if I tried, but I'm not much on the game.

SUNSHINE. Please try. I think so much of Bird. Here she comes now, and I know you're just dying to be alone with her. Now, do your best to make up with her, for you've made her so miserable.

SMITH. Didn't mean to, I'm sure. I—I—

BIRD *enters C.*

BIRD. Am I interrupting something strictly private and personal?

SMITH. Not a bit of it.

SUNSHINE (*hand on BIRD's arm*). Now, don't you go and get jealous of me, too. I was just going, anyway. (*Goes C., turns back at door, shaking finger at SMITH playfully.*) Now you be good, Mr. Smith. (*Exits.*)

BIRD (*watches her off*).. That blessed girl! What does she mean?

SMITH. Why, don't you see? She takes me for some intimate friend of yours and wants me to coax you to make up with me for something or other—

BIRD (*laughing*). That explains it all, then. I knew everybody else was wondering who and what you were—

SMITH (*brings phonograph in from out R. entrance and places it on table, arranging horn, etc., while talking*). Yes, but I've knocked around the world enough to know how to make myself "all things to all men" when the occasion demands. I can be Mr. Bright's preacher, Mrs. Bright's doctor, Melinda's *Banner*-man, whatever that is, and Jake's real estate agent, or something of the sort, and still have time enough left to be your lover, if it's necessary. (*She turns away indignantly.*) Anyway, Miss Denton, you just must help me to get next to that fellow who calls himself "Westcott." He means mischief.

BIRD. Yes, I've been sure of that for a long time. Why, he must be all of forty years old. What can a man of his years mean by hanging around a little girl like Sunny?

SMITH. Right you are. Of his years—and reputation. (*Stops work with phonograph, looks around cautiously and walks to her, hand on arm.*) Miss Denton, listen. I came here to get the best of him for the sake of humanity, and—my employer, who must be nameless for awhile.

BIRD (*nodding*). I see.

SMITH. But I am going to stay and carry out my plans, if it takes till the Day of Judgment, and then some—for the sake of that girl.

BIRD. Sunny?

SMITH. You're a nice girl, Miss Denton, and I like you. (*She bows thanks, mockingly.*) So I don't mind telling you, just on the side, that I'm badly hit there—a case of craze at first sight. She's just the sweetest girl I ever saw, and I'm willing to give my very life, if need be, to save her. You'll help me, won't you?

BIRD (*extending hand*). Count on me. I'm no detective—but—

BRIGHT and WESTCOTT enter R., while their hands are still clasped. They break hastily apart. SMITH returns to

fussing with phonograph and cuts in hastily with change of subject.

SMITH. As I was saying, this is the very best machine, with the most up-to-date records on the market. Like phonographs?

BIRD. Love 'em! (*Sits chair left of table, SMITH standing behind table.*)

WESTCOTT. Music, eh? Some of the canned stuff. Well, dish it out. (*Sits chair near right front, BRIGHT resuming his rocker.*)

SUNSHINE *leads Mrs. B. in C.*

SUNSHINE. Well, mamma, guess we're just in time to be entertained. (*Leads her to lounge. Then sits hassock at her feet.*)

SMITH. I have some tip-top records. Here's a dandy! (*Puts on record. Any familiar church hymn.*)

SUNSHINE (*jumps up, runs to C. entrance, calls.*) 'Lindy! 'Lindy!

MELINDA (*out C.*). Coming!

SUNSHINE. Come and hear the music. (*Returns to place.*)

BRIGHT (*looks scornfully at phonograph*). What you going to do with that thing up here, anyway?

SMITH. I—I—why, I often find it takes the place with me of a regular choir, you know. 'Tain't right for the devil to have all the fun. We have to resort to modern methods to beat the old duck at his own game.

MELINDA *enters C., claps hands.*

MELINDA. Oh, isn't it just too romantic? (*Sits behind lounge, never moving her eyes from phonograph, backing into place.*)

MRS. B. (*looks from one to the other, puzzled. Then to SMITH*). Did you bring that with you?

SMITH. Certainly. I find music a great agent in the healing of the sick.

MELINDA. I must just write you some poetry about it, sir, for next week's *Banner*.

SMITH (*removing record*). Oh, you needn't bother, my dear Miss Bendy. The *Banner* would be too highly honored, I'm sure. (*Puts on waltz record.*)

WESTCOTT (*instantly alert*). Ah! that's something like it. (*Jumps up, runs to BIRD.*) Come on, Miss Denton. I'm sure you know this. (*They waltz around stage.*)

BRIGHT (*jumping up in anger and making frantic attempts to stop them*). Stop! Stop! Stop this minute, I say! (*They finally stop.*) No such wickedness shall ever take place in my house. (*Turns to SMITH.*) And what do you mean, sir—you, minister of the gospel, by—

SMITH (*searches for record, looking shocked and looking very carefully through case*). Now, how in the world did that record get in there? Somebody must have tried to play a joke on me. I am shocked—horrified!

MELINDA (*jumping up and extending hand as JAKE enters R.*). Why, come right in, Jake. It certainly is good to see you again after so long a separation.

JAKE (*astounded by this reception*). Yes, yes! I guess so.

MELINDA (*still holding hand, speaks pleadingly*). Don't say you've forgotten me.

JAKE (*protesting*). Why, now, 'Lindy—

MELINDA (*looking at him closely*). And you are not changed a mite.

JAKE (*staring at her*). No—no—I—

MELINDA. Why, you don't look scarcely an hour older. I should have known you at once anywhere. (*Leads him to chair at R. of table, takes his hat.*)

SMITH. Here's a record I am especially anxious for Mrs. Bright to hear. In fact, all the ladies will enjoy it. It is a dear old song as rendered with the greatest success by one of our most talented and famous opera singers. (*Puts on record of "Home, Sweet Home," "The Little Old Red Shawl My Mother Wore," or any old familiar song of home and mother, in female voice.*)

MRS. B. (*sits up excitedly*). That voice! Oh, that voice! (*BRIGHT stares at the phonograph. WESTCOTT turns back and begins to read, near front, holding newspaper bottom side up, however, and his ear turned to listen, with expres-*

sion of scorn, wonder and chagrin. SMITH covertly watches them all.) Lem! Lem! Do listen! It is Star—Star, don't you hear? Her very own voice!

BRIGHT. Nonsense! Star is dead. She is dead, dead, dead, I tell you. This is just some more of the devil's doings in the play-acting line. (*Turns angrily to SMITH.*) Take the thing out! Take the thing out, I tell you. And go along with it—the whole crowd of you! Move! (*He drives them all out but MRS. B., SUNSHINE and himself.*) You've done mischief enough for one day. (*SUNSHINE lingers, walking toward lounge. He motions her peremptorily away and watches till she goes out C. with lowered head.*)

MRS. B. Oh, Lem! It was Star! She's alive! Alive!

BRIGHT. More's the pity if she is. But I've said a good many times before, and I say it now, and I'm likely to say it again if I'm put to it, that she's no child of mine.

MRS. B. Oh, Lem! If you only would forgive her!

BRIGHT (*stalking up and down angrily*). Forgive a miserable, wicked woman for disgracing my name, almost wrecking my home and killing my wife before my eyes? Never!

MRS. B. 'Tisn't Star that's killing me.

BRIGHT (*pausing beside her*). Then I'd like to know what—

MRS. B. It's you, Lem, and the way you act about it. It's just eating my heart out. If I could only see her again; could know she was well and prosperous and happy; could know she hadn't forgotten her mother—(*weeps*).

BRIGHT. That's enough of that nonsense. I'm glad I've got backbone enough to do my duty. You'd make a whopping big fool of yourself if I'd let you; but I won't—won't—won't—do you hear? She's a low, worthless sinner and she shall never darken my door to my dying day! (*Stalks out R. Just outside entrance, calls.*) Sunshine! (*Re-enters, stalks to C. entrance. Calls.*) Sunshine! Where is that girl, anyhow? Sunshine!

SUNSHINE (*out C. as from distant room*). Yes, papa.

BRIGHT. Your mother wants you. Come and see to her.

SUNSHINE (*as before*). Yes, papa.

BRIGHT (*walks back to center of room*). Not a word to the girl, now. Do you understand?

MRS. B. (*meekly*). Yes. (BRIGHT *exits R. She trembles with fear of him, then covers face and weeps.*) Oh, Star! Star! My own little girl! Where have you been and what have you done all these long, long years, and I—your mother—not even allowed to hear from you?

SMITH *enters C., advances slowly toward her. She hears step but does not look up.*

MRS. B. Don't come in just yet, darling.

SMITH (*stops as if struck, speaks aside*). Gee! Sounds mighty friendly. (*Speaks aloud, lightly.*) All right, I won't if you'd rather not see me.

MRS. B. (*sits up, startled*). Oh, the doctor! You frightened me so. I thought it was Sunshine.

SMITH. You flatter me, Mrs. Bright. Do I really look like Miss Sunshine?

MRS. B. I didn't see you, doctor. I just—oh, don't try to be funny, please, when my heart is aching so.

SMITH (*sits lounge beside her*). I know it is, Mrs. Bright, and that is just why I want to talk to you. I—I—(*aside*) oh, hang it all, how's a fellow going to put it to her? (*Aloud.*) I hate to butt into private affairs, Mrs. Bright, even when it's my business to act the goat, but I—I—oh, dang it all! I put that record in the phonograph for a purpose, Mrs. Bright—in fact, I brought it with me just for that.

MRS. B. You did? Oh, do you know anything about—about *her*? Is she alive? Oh, do tell me that—only just that!

SMITH. Indeed she is, Mrs. Bright, very much alive, and—(*she begins to weep*) oh, you mustn't break down again, Mrs. Bright. You've got to brace up, for I've a snag of stuff to unload in your ears. Ain't there some place—

MRS. B. (*looking around in fear*). But Mr. Bright would not like—

SMITH. Hang Mr. Bright! (*She looks up shocked.*) Pardon me, Mrs. Bright, but it's such utter nonsense, you

know, that a mother should not be allowed to say what she pleases about her own daughter.

MRS. B. But he's so angry if I—

SMITH (*sympathetically*). I know.

MRS. B. (*astounded*). You—

SMITH. Yes, I do know, Mrs. Bright, more than you think I do. I can see through a barn door when it's left open. And I know, too, what it's all doing for you. You have no right to be sick like this. It's only the poison of that man's hate that—

MRS. B. (*looking around again*). Oh, do hush! I'm so— (*Drops shawl.*)

SMITH. Yes, your nerves are all in shreds. Can't I see? Don't I know? (*Picks up shawl. She motions it away. He lays it on lounge.*) Ain't I the doctor, I'd like to know? How can I cure you if—

MRS. B. Oh, do you really think you can?

SMITH. Know I can, if you'll be good and let me. Let us find some quiet place where I can have a chance to talk to you undisturbed for a little. Somebody is sure to come in here and interrupt, and I—(*after slight hesitation she yields and he helps her up.*) Come on; that's right. (*Leads her carefully out C.*)

MELINDA *enters R. and watches them exit with wide open eyes.*

MELINDA (*at R.*). Humph! (*Follows them to center of room.*) Humph! (*Follows to C. entrance and looks off after them.*) Humph! (*Turns back into room.*) He seems to be more kind to her than to his own honey bunch. If Ethelbert Ferdinand DeLancy should ever act like that to some other woman, and I should catch him at it, I'd never, never, never carry his picture against my fond and tender bosom again! Why, I wouldn't put it even in my shoe! (*Takes out photo, gazing at it.*) Oh, Ethelbert! If I could just gaze at will into those deep, wonderful eyes—wonder how one goes about it to "gaze at will," anyhow? If I could only bask in the radiant light of that brilliant smile! But I ain't never had no practice at the "basking"

act, and ain't sure how it's done! And this Miss Denton wanted to know where I got you! The inquisitiveness of some people's boarders! Wouldn't she smile, though, if she knew that I just bought you out of a store when I went up to town to take in the sights? People might talk if they knew; but let 'em gab, for all I care! Ain't I got a right to spend my own hard-earned money just as I like!

JAKE *enters C., slowly advances till he finally looks over shoulder at picture.*

MELINDA. And, oh, Ethelbert! You are so handsome, so fine and romantic looking! It just makes my heart go pitty-pat, pitty-pat when I gaze upon your beautiful face! (JAKE *shakes fist at picture. She turns, sees him and screams.*) O-o-o-o-h! Why, Jake Hoover! Where'd you come from?

JAKE. Barn!

MELINDA (*drops to chair, panting and fanning herself with apron*). You did give me such a start. (JAKE *fans her with handkerchief.*)

JAKE (*points to picture on lap*). Who's that?

MELINDA (*jumps up, hides picture in dress*). That's my business. Don't you wish you knew, Jake Hoover? I—I—I must go and look if my cake ain't burning. (*Hurries out C.*)

JAKE (*looking out C.*). There! She's gone again! And that feller's picture with her! Blast his pretty face! That's why she ain't never had no time for me. If I just had him here by the hair of his head, I'd—I'd—why, I'd break him all to pieces and bust his brains out with this here chair! (*Picks up chair and pounds floor with it savagely, pantomimes fighting with fists, throwing an adversary, kicking, etc.*)

MELINDA *reappears at C.*

MELINDA. Mercy on me, Jake! What are you doing?

JAKE (*sheepishly*). Oh, nothing.

MELINDA. Looks like it.

JAKE. Just practicing up a little to strengthen my muscle.

MELINDA. Well, if that ain't the limit! Seems to me you'd better practice on something besides Lem Bright's

furniture. Come on out to the kitchen and I'll give you some exercise that'll beat that monkey-shining all to smithereens.

BRIGHT *enters R. with newspaper.*

JAKE. But I—I—(*still holds chair over head and glares at floor vindictively.* BRIGHT *coughs as he sits rocker R. and JAKE puts chair down hastily.*) Just as you say, 'Lindy. (*Follows her out C. meekly.*)

SUNSHINE *enters R. followed by WESTCOTT.*

SUNSHINE. A letter for you, papa. (*Hands it to him, then sits lounge.* WESTCOTT *sits beside her. Dumb conversation.*)

BRIGHT. Humph! Wonder who's writing to me. (*Looks postmark.*) From the city, too. A bill, most likely, or a circular advertising automobiles and marble palaces on the installment plan! (*Opens letter.*) Pretty writing, anyway. (*Reads.*) "Dear Mr. Bright"—(*rather familiar*): "Having been referred to your home as being a desirable place to spend the summer, and being a *prima donna*"—(*jumps up and looks closely, as to get better light*)—yes, it certainly does say *prima donna*—(*pronounces slowly and with difficulty*)—now what in the world does that mean?

WESTCOTT. An opera singer, Mr. Bright. Leading lady in grand opera, you know.

BRIGHT (*horrified*). Not an actress?

WESTCOTT. Well, yes, something of the sort.

BRIGHT (*resumes reading, holding letter at arm's length*). "A *prima donna* in the Wagnerian Grand Opera Company, just closing its season, I am in search of a nice, quiet spot for a rest during my vacation, and write to ask if you have any rooms disengaged, and if I may secure accommodations for the next two months. Will pay the very highest price for suitable room and board." (*Pauses, re-reading last sentence.*) Yes, no mistake. That's just what it says, word for word. "Am having considerable trouble with my eyes and should like to come to Mountdale at once, if arrangements can be made. Shall appreciate it if you will telegraph immediate reply at my expense. Madame Odilla Ormand."

(*Holds letter from him between thumb and forefinger as if poison.*) An actress! A wicked play-acting, trash-singing, painted-up doll, gallivanting around my farm, disgracing the pigs and the sheep and the cows, and primy-donnying all over the place. Brazen thing! Never! But what did she say? (*Reads from letter.*) "Will pay the very highest price for suitable room and board." It don't seem as if we ought to let that slip between our fingers, when we've got so much room going to waste, and need the money so much worse. But an actress! What would the new preacher say? Though, so far as he goes, he seems inclined to be altogether too worldly-minded to suit my ideas. But an actress! Humph! Grand opera, indeed! It does beat all what the devil calls "grand." And did she think that "*prima donna*" thing would take the curse off with a man like me? (*Thinks, shaking head.*)

SUNSHINE (*who has listened eagerly to letter, speaks to WESTCOTT*). Oh, wouldn't it be just too lovely! A real, live *prima donna*! And right in our very own house! Don't you know, I've never seen the inside of a theatre nor an opera house in all my life.

WESTCOTT. Poor girl. It's just too bad.

BRIGHT. She shan't come! She shan't! I just won't have the air polluted with her wicked atmosphere. (*Starts C.*)

SUNSHINE (*rises and goes to him*). But, papa—

BRIGHT (*turning to her*). Well?

SUNSHINE. We do need the money so bad. You know that mortgage—

BRIGHT. Yes, the money—I know—and the mortgage, too. But an actress! A wicked stage woman! Never! (*Starts C. again. Speaks over shoulder.*) Where's your mother?

SUNSHINE. On the front porch.

BRIGHT. I'll just go show her the audacity of such people in asking me—me—me—to give shelter to an actress! (*Exits C.*)

WESTCOTT (*laughingly*). He'll wire her to come all right.

SUNSHINE (*walking back to lounge*). Oh, I don't know. He hates such things so.

WESTCOTT. It's just the way he makes himself think about them.

SUNSHINE (*sits lounge beside him*). Of course. Thoughts are strange things, aren't they? It seems as though it's never the things that happen to you that matter so much as it is the way you look at them.

WESTCOTT. I never thought of that especially, but—

SUNSHINE. Oh, I have. I've been alone so much, you see, until this summer, that I've just had to think things out for myself. And I often wonder if everything isn't really just what you think it is; if the ideal within you isn't the most real part of your life; if thoughts aren't the only real things there are.

WESTCOTT. Of course. And so, you see, there's nothing really wrong at all about your slipping out and going to college as I proposed. If you didn't persist in thinking so—

SUNSHINE. Why, that's so, isn't it? I hadn't thought of that.

WESTCOTT. Of course it is. And if you deliberately refuse to take your chance when it's offered to you, it'll only be your own fault if—

SUNSHINE (*jumping up eagerly*). Oh, I see! I see! It's the white rose bending down to me. If I don't pick it, it will fly up again, of course.

BIRD *comes to C. entrance, watches and listens.*

WESTCOTT (*following her*). Then you will—you really will?

SUNSHINE. Oh, yes! yes. (*Extends hands to him.*) And I thank you so much—oh, so much!

WESTCOTT. Nonsense. You know I'd give the world to make you happy.

SUNSHINE. I always knew there was a big nameless Something somewhere that would take care of me so long as I did the right thing. I'm always taken care of. I've always got to be.

WESTCOTT. Yes, yes; of course. (*Turns away to R., speaks aside.*) When she talks like that, she almost makes me turn into a quitter. Brace up, Westcott, and take your

chance. Don't be a baby at this late day. (*Turns to her, speaks aloud.*) We mustn't lose any time. We must hurry away.

(*Stage gradually grows dark.*)

SUNSHINE. When?

WESTCOTT. Tonight. At once.

SUNSHINE. So soon? Well, I must get my things. I—I—wait for me just outside, Mr.—Mr.—

WESTCOTT (*reproachfully*). You promised to call me—

SUNSHINE. Yes, I know—Arthur—but it doesn't seem to come easy and natural, somehow. Something seems to tell me—

WESTCOTT. Hurry! If your father should suspect—

SUNSHINE. Yes, yes. I won't be a minute. (*Rushes out C., knocks against BIRD.*) Excuse me, Bird, I—I—

BIRD. You seem in a hurry, Sunny.

SUNSHINE. Yes, yes. That is, a little, I guess, I—I—(*exits embarrassed.*)

BIRD (*advancing into room, speaks sharply*). And you, too, Mr. Westcott. You seem greatly hurried—and worried a little, maybe. What's wrong?

WESTCOTT (*savagely*). Nothing! (*Aside at R.*) Does that young cat suspect anything? (*Exits, BIRD watching, and he eying her as closely.*)

BIRD. Something's going to happen; that's sure. Wish I could have heard it all. I do wish Mr. Smith—

SMITH *enters C.*

SMITH. Who wishes Mr. Smith?

BIRD (*meets him center*). Oh, I'm so glad you have come!

SMITH. Good. It's so sweet to be appreciated. I just met Miss Sunshine hurrying to her room and she told me you were in here, and for me to come in and be real good to you, for she could see you were just breaking your heart about me.

BIRD. Well, let her think so.

SMITH (*walking to lounge*). Sure. If she could only make *me* think so.

BIRD. Don't be silly. You can't flirt worth a cent.

SMITH (*drops to lounge as though fainting*). Crushed!

BIRD (*sits by him*). And do listen. I've something very serious to say to you.

SMITH (*all attention at once*). Really? I thought this was serious enough.

BIRD. Yes. I just happened in on Mr. Westcott and Sunshine as they parted here a moment ago. He was urging her to do something, and she finally consented. All I could hear positively was, "I will," and "Tonight." Then she hurried out.

SMITH (*rising excitedly*). That's why she was running so fast when she passed me.

BIRD. I've no idea what it was all about, of course; but I don't feel easy about it. (*Rising.*) I can't think everything is just right when—

SMITH (*bitterly*). Nothing is ever just right where that scoundrel is. He's surely plotting deviltry of some kind against that blessed little girl, and we've got to stop him.

BIRD. But how?

SMITH. Watch him.

BIRD. But whatever is done must be done quickly.

SMITH. Of course.

BIRD. See how dark it's getting.

SMITH. We won't light the lamp. We'll just watch—hush! (*Hide by lounge.*)

SUNSHINE *enters cautiously C. Carries small valise.*

SUNSHINE. Nobody here? All safe so far. Oh, when I have proven myself worthy, papa will surely forgive me for snatching my fighting chance when it came my way. (*Turns, throws kiss back toward C.*) Good-bye, mamma darling. I did not dare to kiss your face for fear you might suspect something; but this old shawl, almost a part of you—(*takes shawl from lounge, kisses it and holds to her*).

BIRD (*coming out of the shadow*). Sunny! (SUNSHINE screams.) What does this mean?

SUNSHINE (*tremblingly*). I—I—why, nothing, only—o-o-o-h! Mr. Smith, are you here, too? Let me go. I—I—

SMITH. No, Miss Sunshine, sit down. We cannot and will not let you go to join that scoundrel until we know—

BRIGHT *enters C. with* MRS. B. *on arm.*

BRIGHT. What is all this? We heard screaming. Sunshine, is that you? Where were you going with that satchel? (*BIRD leads MRS. B. to lounge.*)

SUNSHINE. Just—to town.

BRIGHT. Town? With whom?

SUNSHINE (*looks helplessly around room. Then speaks bravely.*) Mr. Westcott.

BRIGHT. Westcott? The villain! (*Stalks around room, looking for him.*)

SUNSHINE (*catches him by arm*). No, no, papa. Listen. He was only going to take me to his sister in Philadelphia, where I was going to get ready for—for—

BRIGHT. Out with it!

SUNSHINE. College.

BRIGHT (*sarcastically*). A likely* story. Girls usually start for college when they run away from home with old men! Do you think I'm a fool that I can't see the vile thing you were planning to—

MRS. B. Lemuel!

BRIGHT. Let me alone, woman. Keep your nose out. I will say what I think. I will let her know what a disgrace she has made herself—

SUNSHINE (*sinks on hassock*). No, no!

SMITH. Mr. Bright, you are unjust. I know Westcott, and the worthless thing he is, so I've not the slightest doubt that he had plotted your daughter's ruin. It's a habit of his. But I will stake my life that she herself was as pure in thought and purpose as an angel.

BRIGHT. Looks like it!

BIRD. Mr. Bright, I *know* it. I overheard enough of his argument to—

WESTCOTT *enters R., speaking cautiously.*

WESTCOTT. Sunshine, are you coming?

Lights suddenly turned on as MELINDA enters C. with lighted lamp.

MELINDA. Don't you folks want some light?

BRIGHT (*grabbing WESTCOTT by collar*). You scoundrel! You villain! (MRS. B. *screams*.) Sunshine, look after your mother. (*Leads WESTCOTT aside at R. and talk in vehement dumb show. SUNSHINE sits lounge and rubs MRS. B.'s hands.*)

BIRD (*aside to SMITH*). Let us leave them alone. (*He bows assent and follows her out C., quietly.*)

MRS. B. Oh, Sunny! Sunny! What will your father do about this?

SUNSHINE. Never mind, mamma. He can't—

BRIGHT (*dragging WESTCOTT across to them*). Come right along, sir! No hanging back! I've had one girl ruined by an infernal puppy, but it's not going to happen again in this family! You've gone so far and you're going the rest. Two weeks from today you shall marry her. (SUNSHINE *jumps up, facing them.*)

MRS. B. (*rising in alarm*). Lemuel!

SUNSHINE. Oh, papa, papa! Not that! That old man—not that!

WESTCOTT. But, Mr. Bright, listen. I didn't—

BRIGHT. Not a word from either of you! I know my own gate when I drive up against it, and I mean just what I say! You shall marry her!

(WESTCOTT *hangs head and turns away R. MRS. B. falls back on lounge, while SUNSHINE kneels beside her, burying her face on her shoulder and sobbing audibly. BRIGHT holds commanding post for quick—*)

CURTAIN.

ACT III.

SCENE: *Room of MADAME ORMAND, two weeks later. Bed at upper right of stage. If desired a folding bed may be substituted for this, same being placed where lounge now stands, and lounge brought across to replace bed and furnish seat in this position. Fireplace near right front. Above it, a picture, face to wall. In front of it a rocker, facing fire. Table at center front, with books, magazines, etc. Dressing-table at left, with long mirror. Chair in front of it. Lounge across back from center door to door left. Rocker in front of it. Hall-tree at right, between bed and door C. Pennants and girlish decorations and souvenirs everywhere at taste of the producer. Room is set in 3, with wainscot backing in 5, to represent hall. Practical doors at C., opening into hall, and at L., near back, opening into SUNSHINE'S room.*

At rise discovered SUNSHINE, dusting table and arranging books, etc. MRS. B. standing in door at L., watching her and surveying room.

MRS. B. I do hope the lady will be pleased.

SUNSHINE. Why, mamma, I'm sure she will. It looks so cozy. But—(*hesitates*)

MRS. B. (*walks to her*). Yes, dear; what is it?

SUNSHINE. Isn't it strange she should come today? And—do you think she'll get here before—before—(*drops head and turns away*).

MRS. B. (*sits lounge as if overcome*). Come here, Sunny. (*SUNSHINE walks to her.*) Tell me all about it, dear.

SUNSHINE. Oh, mamma! What does papa mean by forcing this terrible marriage? I simply cannot understand it all. Surely he—my own father—cannot think I could possibly be—a bad girl?

MRS. B. He doesn't understand you, dear. He doesn't understand anybody who is not just exactly like himself. He has been getting more and more bitter against everything bright and joyous ever since—since—

SUNSHINE. Since what, mamma? What have I ever done to make him bitter?

MRS. B. Not you, Sunny. Oh, never you.

SUNSHINE. Then who? What?

MRS. B. He forbade me to tell you, dear, but I see I must. Your sister Star—you remember her?

SUNSHINE. Oh, yes, indeed. She was so lovely. How could I forget?

MRS. B. She had a wonderful voice and seemed to know just how to use it, so she was always wild to have it trained for the stage. It was her one dream by day and night. I think she inherited it from me, for I was stage-struck, too, in my young days. I suppose most girls have a little of it.

SUNSHINE. Well, I never was stage-struck, mamma, but I've always been college-struck, you know; so I can understand how Star felt. Did she die?

MRS. B. No, no, dear, listen. You know how your father feels about the stage, and dancing, and all that, so you can imagine how he raved whenever she dared even to hint of it, so she just naturally seemed to give it up. Then we sent her to college. She was only sixteen—just your age now, Sunny, but she had finished High School and was very bright for her age. At college she met an actor—an Arthur Pulver. He learned of her ambition and they often met clandestinely, as we learned afterward, till, promising to launch her properly on the stage, he lured her—well, she left the college with him and—

SUNSHINE. Then she didn't die?

MRS. B. We never knew. Your father raved like a madman when he heard the news, and disowned her, then and there. He forbade anyone's mentioning her name and all these years has declared that you were his only child.

SUNSHINE. I know.

MRS. B. I've always kept the room just as she left it, Sunny—right here so close to yours—and I just couldn't destroy her picture as he ordered me—it was her graduating picture—so I turned it to the wall.

SUNSHINE (*springing up*). Oh, is that Star's picture? I've always wondered. May I look? (*Runs eagerly to pic-*

ture, MRS. B. following. They stand silently, arms about one another, gazing at the picture with much emotion.)

MRS. B. (*tenderly turning picture again to the wall*). Sunny, all this is what has made an invalid of me. (*Sits rocker fronting fireplace.*) The conflict between love for my child and duty to my husband. It's killing me by inches. Do you wonder now what turned my hair to snow?

SUNSHINE (*behind mother's chair, smoothing hair and gazing thoughtfully in fire*). So that's why papa hates colleges so.

MRS. B. Yes; he has always sworn that you should never leave his roof until he saw you safely married. He believes that Star was ruined, and now that you—(*draws SUNSHINE'S head down to hers*). Oh, Sunny! Sunny! If I could only save you from this!

SUNSHINE. There, there, mamma. Never you mind. I'll—

MELINDA enters C., followed by STAR.

MELINDA. This is the room, Mrs.—er—Madame, and right here's Mrs. Bright now, and Sunshine, too.

MRS. B. (*advancing with SUNSHINE to meet her*). And this is Madame Ormand, of course. I hope we can make it very pleasant for you here. (*Exit MELINDA, C.*)

STAR (*visibly moved as they shake hands*). I'm sure it will be most charming. I get so little time for the country in my busy life. And this is your daughter, Miss—(*extends hand to SUNSHINE*).

SUNSHINE. Just Sunshine, please, Madame.

STAR (*sweetly*). Could a ray of sunshine "by any other name" seem quite so bright?

MRS. B. (*hastily, to turn attention from SUNSHINE'S evident sadness*). This is the only room we have left, Madame Ormand. We hope you will like it. To tell you the truth, we hesitated for some time about putting a stranger into it. It has not been used before for twelve years.

STAR (*looking around room, endeavoring to conceal anything but casual interest*). So long? A cherished guest-room, perhaps? (*Walks R., inspecting fireplace.*)

MRS. B. (*warmly*). Cherished, yes!—but—not exactly—

(*struggles to choke back emotion, backing toward dressing-table. SUNSHINE walks back of table, watching STAR.*) Well, we hope you will like it.

STAR (*looking all around appreciatively*). I am sure I shall. It is very dainty and sweet. (*Begins to remove veil, hat, gloves, etc.*)

SUNSHINE (*goes door L.*). This door opens into my room, Madame Ormand. But it will not annoy you any after today. I—I—well, you see, I won't be here any longer.

STAR (*front of bed, pauses while taking pin from hat*). Oh, you are going on your vacation, too?

SUNSHINE. No—no—not a vacation, you know. I—I—the truth is, I—you tell her, mamma. (*Sits lounge, looking down*).

MRS. B. (*walks toward SUNSHINE*). My daughter is going to be married today, Madame Ormand. You are just in time to witness the ceremony.

STAR. Oh, how lovely! I adore weddings—real ones. And I do hope this is going to be a real one, and that you will be very, very happy.

SUNSHINE (*rising*). I thank you so much, Madame Ormand. I—am sure—I shall. (*Clings to MRS. B. a moment, then turns to STAR bravely.*) We are always happy when we do what is right, are we not?

STAR (*removing cloak, smoothing it out, etc.*). We ought to be, hadn't we?—when we are sure we are right. (*Hangs cloak on hall-tree.*)

MRS. B. Pardon me, but I must be seeing to your things, you know, Sunny. And Madame Ormand will want to rest. (*Walks door L.*)

STAR (*goes to SUNSHINE, putting arm around her*). Oh, do let her stay with me till we get acquainted, Mrs. Bright. I do so love the young—especially brides. (*SUNSHINE drops head at word.*)

MRS. B. If you are sure she won't disturb you—

STAR (*drawing her closer*). How ridiculous! (*MRS. B. exits L. STAR smiles and bows sweetly as she leaves.*)

Thank you so much. (*To SUNSHINE, as she releases her.*) We're going to be the best of friends, aren't we?

SUNSHINE. It's so sweet of you to say so. (*STAR busies herself putting her gloves, veil, etc., in drawer of dresser. SUNSHINE sits lounge watching. After a pause.*) But can we ever be sure we are doing exactly right?

STAR (*at dresser, does not turn*). Of course. Always.

SUNSHINE. How? When a girl is very young, you know, she must do as her father and mother say—

STAR (*at dresser, taking down hair*). And how about that other prompter—the “still, small voice” of the real self within, that some call conscience and others call the very soul itself? Does it not impel us always to the right course?

SUNSHINE. I—I—I'm afraid not. Not when older people say so differently. (*Rises, crosses to STAR.*) What lovely hair you have. Won't you let me comb it for you? (*STAR sits front of mirror. SUNSHINE combs hair.*) We must always do just what is right, you know.

STAR. And if it hurts?

SUNSHINE. Why, then, we must just go and play it doesn't. If we make believe it's easy, maybe it won't be so hard after awhile. But—my! how serious we are getting for our first talk together!

STAR. And on your wedding day, too.

SUNSHINE. Oh, yes, yes. Why, I was forgetting, wasn't I? Do I pull?

STAR. Not a bit.

SUNSHINE. It looks lovely. There. How's that? (*Arranging hair on head.*)

STAR (*studying reflection in glass*). Fine. Wherever did you learn? Don't you know you haven't told me a single word about your lover?

SUNSHINE. My lover? Why—oh, yes. I—I—do you mind if I show you his picture?

STAR. Why, I'll be charmed to see it, dear.

SUNSHINE. Wait till I get another pin in, so this won't come down. There. (*Goes door L., opens it.*) Mamma, hand me that picture of Mr.—Arthur, please—yes, over on the machine—that's it—thank you. (*Closes door, returns*

to STAR, looing at picture with expression of fear while crossing.) Here he is, Madame Ormand. (*Hands picture to STAR, goes lounge to pick up handkerchief.*)

STAR (*studying picture, aside*). Yes, Smith was right. It is Arthur. I felt sure there was no chance for a mistake. (*SUNSHINE returns.*) Child, do you love him? This man you are to marry?

SUNSHINE. Love him? Oh, no. Why, I never thought of doing that. He's more than twice as old as I am. Are your eyes very bad?

STAR (*aside*). Thank heaven for that! (*Aloud.*) Not seriously so, I hope. I only thought best to wear these glasses during the summer. But why—if you do not love—but here I am intruding into what is none of my business. You must pardon me. I am always so interested in young girls and their romances. (*Rises.*) I must unpack my little grip. (*Goes bed, opens grip, takes out toilet articles, handkerchiefs, etc.*)

SUNSHINE (*following*). Romances? Oh, yes. But—let's talk about something else. Bird Denton says she knows you real well.

STAR. Yes, I met Miss Denton at the seaside two years ago, and we've been excellent friends ever since. (*Takes photograph from grip.*) My latest photo. Do you like it? (*SUNSHINE takes photo, looking admiringly at it.*) She seems very much in love just now. (*Busy unpacking.*) I have never met her lover. Have you?

SUNSHINE (*placing photo on dressing-table*). Isn't it lovely? So like you.

STAR (*over shoulder*). But we were speaking of Miss Denton's lover. Have you met him?

SUNSHINE (*still at dresser*). Yes. He's here now.

STAR (*turning to face her*). He is? (*SUNSHINE nods.*) She didn't tell me that. (*Turns back to unpacking.*) Do you like him?

SUNSHINE (*fingering things on dresser*). Very much. He's a real man. He's—(*turns, crosses to STAR*). But would you mind talking about something else? (*Looks around in search of subject.*) I hope you will like your room.

(STAR goes to dresser with things from grip, begins to put them away in drawers. SUNSHINE seats herself on foot of bed, watching.) It was very hard for mamma to see anyone using it. You see, I had a sister once—and when she left, mamma kept her room always just as it was.

STAR (at dresser, busy. After pause). I see. Did she die?

SUNSHINE. No—that is, I don't know. You see, they never talk of her. I never knew a thing about what happened to her until today, and then—only a word.

STAR (after another busy pause). I understand. Poor thing! (Closes drawers, turning to face SUNSHINE, resting hands on table, L.) I wonder what became of her.

SUNSHINE. I often wonder, too. Sometimes I lie awake very late at night wondering and wondering. I was a mere baby when she left, but I loved her very much, and—I've been lonely ever since; while mamma—well, you see for yourself what an invalid it has made of her.

STAR (walks to rocker by fireplace, leaning on back and looking in fire). And your father?

SUNSHINE. Is very bitter. He swore she should never darken his doors again. There! (Jumping up.) He has forbidden me to mention this, even to him and mamma, and here I am telling it all to a stranger.

STAR (sits rocker). Oh, don't think of me as a stranger. Don't you see I have come here to be one of the family?

SUNSHINE (sits arm of chair). That's so sweet of you. I don't see why I have told you so much. It's not like me to talk of family affairs, but you seemed to draw it out of me, somehow. (Rises, reaching to touch picture above mantel.) This was her picture, taken when she graduated from High School. When she left, papa ordered mamma to destroy it, but she—well, she just couldn't, somehow. Mothers are queer about things like that, you know, aren't they?

STAR (in choked voice). Delightfully so, God bless them. That's why God made mothers out of them.

SUNSHINE. So she compromised by turning the face to the wall. Nobody else could see it, you know; but she

always knew it was there, just as I'm sure the dear memory of my sister has been living in her big heart, although she had to keep it covered up for so long where not even I could see. But there I go again! Let's talk about something else. (*Leans against foot of bed, STAR in rocker.*) It must be fine to be an actress.

STAR. Yes, of course—when one is strong enough. But one has to live much and feel deeply before one can be a successful actress; must often singe one's own wings, in order to be able to portray the fire. Genius costs its full price. It's a hard life, dear.

MRS. B. (*comes door L.*). Sunshine. (*SUNSHINE turns. STAR rises, turns.*)

SUNSHINE. Oh, mamma, is it time?

MRS. B. Past. (*Exits, leaving door open.*)

SUNSHINE. I must go and dress, I suppose. I'll be glad when it's all over. (*Walks L.*) It must be for the best, of course, or it could never come to me—but I've no idea of what lies ahead. (*At door turns back to face STAR, who has followed her.*) Still, they say when we can't see ahead of us, it's only because we are coming to a corner.

STAR. We must always hope so, dear. (*Exit SUNSHINE, closing door.*) Oh, I am so glad I came in time. (*Walks to dresser.*) If I had been a day too late—! What a change these glasses do make in me (*at mirror*)! It's no wonder that nobody has recognized me so far! (*Walks back to fireplace.*) I was afraid of father's sharp eyes, but he seemed too much taken up with his miserable wedding to give me more than a passing glance and a nod. And this dear old picture! (*Turns it around, wipes dust from it with handkerchief and either sings or repeats:*)

“There's a name that's never spoken,

There's a mother's heart that's broken,

There is just another missing in the old home, that is all;

There is still a memory living,

And a father unforgiving,

And a picture with its face turned toward the wall.”

(*Bows head on mantel and weeps.*) If I can only escape

discovery until—(*Loud knocking at door C. She raises head quickly, goes center.*) Come in.

SMITH *enters C., carrying heavy suitcases.*

SMITH. Your trunks haven't arrived yet, Madame, but I've brought up your suitcases, and—(*looks around*) oho! Alone?

STAR. As you see. Put them under the bed, please. I'm too tired to think of unpacking till I get my mind unloaded.

SMITH (*after placing suitcases*). Well, what do you think of the situation? Am I on the right track?

STAR. Unquestionably. I saw his photo, and—(*walks fireplace, looking fire*). Well, I've been thanking heaven ever since that I was in time. I started just as soon as I received your wire, but the trains didn't move half fast enough to suit me. Are all the arrangements completed?

SMITH (*back of chair, leaning on it, looking at her*). Everything. The bombs are all set, ready to light the fuse. Then hiss—sizz-boom! Won't things blow sky-high, and won't there be some explosion around these parts, eh? Gee! Little Willie's having the time of his life. Me for the fireworks.

STAR. Mr. Smith, I feel that I can never sufficiently repay you for your services in this matter.

SMITH. Oh, don't mention it. (*Walks table, fingering things.*)

STAR. But I must. Can't you imagine what it means to me? My own little baby sister, and—and—(*breaks down, sobbing*).

SMITH (*left of table, both hands on it. Gravely*). Think what it might also mean to me, Madame Ormand!

STAR (*looking up quickly*). To you?

SMITH. Yes—even me. Why, I'd give my very life to save that little girl from trouble.

STAR (*walks to table, stands R.*). Do you mean that you are in love with my sister, Mr. Smith?

SMITH. Well, now, I'm not just sure about that. I know I've lost my head, and gone perfectly daffy about

that little curl at the back of her neck. I know I'd rather have one glance from her eye than to be the Sultan of Borneo with all his harem at my beck and call. I know I moon under her window at all hours of the night, writing sonnets to a button from her shoe. I know I've woke myself up talking about her in my sleep. I know I'd lie down in the mud and let her turn the hose on me all day long if it would please her to do that way to a fellow, but—I don't know whether I'm exactly in love with her or not. You see, I've never had any feelings like this about any other girl, and—(*pauses, shaking head*).

STAR (*laughs*). I guess you have all the symptoms, Mr. Smith. As for Sunshine, of course she's far too young yet—

SMITH. Of course. I wouldn't have her even think of such a thing now.

STAR. That's more sensible than most lovers might be, I'm sure; and some day—after we have seen her through college—I hope—

SMITH. Oh, I say. Do you really mean that?

STAR (*meets him behind table, extending hand*). Here's my hand on it.

SMITH (*pressing hand to his lips*). Gee! But that makes a fellow feel good 'way down to his boots! I—

(*Knock at door C. They hastily separate, SMITH grabbing a magazine and walking down left front, busily reading it, upside down. STAR goes to door and opens it.*)

STAR. Ah! Come right in, Miss Denton.

BIRD *enters, followed by SMYTHE.*

BIRD. And may I bring Mr. Smythe in to see you, Madame Ormand? He just came, you know, and I've always been so anxious for you to meet him.

STAR (*extending hand to him*). Delighted, I'm sure. I've heard so much about you, Mr. Smythe. This girl has raved and raved—

BIRD (*lays finger on STAR's lip*). Don't. You mustn't let him find out how silly I am. Shake hands with Mr. Smith, too.

SMITH (*turning at his name and extending hand to SMYTHE*). Glad to know you. I've been a sort of an understudy to you ever since I came here, Mr. Smythe. (STAR and BIRD converse dumbly back of table. The men L. front.)

SMYTHE (*haughtily staring at him*). Indeed! I don't understand.

SMITH. Yes, I've been getting so much practice as Miss Denton's lover that I believe I could almost do it automatically, now. (BIRD, *uneasy, goes to mirror and begins to fuss with hair, etc.*)

SMYTHE (*jealously, with a quick look at BIRD*). Why—er—I don't think I quite understand—yet.

SMITH (*puzzled*). No? Hasn't Miss Denton told you? (*Shakes finger at her playfully*). Naughty girl. (*She frowns at him over shoulder, he goes on more puzzled than ever*). Well, I'll leave it for her to explain. (*Starts C.*) I have too much on my hands just now—

SMYTHE (*sarcastically*). More understudying?

SMITH. Oh, not exactly.

SMYTHE. More important matters, perhaps—now that my arrival has released you from *substitute* duty.

SMITH. Much more important, Mr. Smythe, I assure you, than trying to fill any other man's shoes. (*At door C., over shoulder.*) I didn't give anything away, did I, Miss Denton?

BIRD (*in exasperated resignation*). Aren't you horrid!

STAR. One moment, Mr. Smith. (*Follows him out C., closing door.*)

BIRD (*turning from mirror*). What in the world did you treat Mr. Smith like that for?

SMYTHE (*walks R. of table*). What in the world did the blooming idiot mean? Evidently he had been used to far different treatment from you. (*Turns to face fire.*)

BIRD. Oh, Walter, don't! He has been here on a secret mission, doing some detective work for Madame Ormand. Miss Bright—Sunshine, you know—knowing I had a lover named Smythe, saw his card the day he came, and his initials being the same as yours, quite naturally con-

cluded that he was the man. We let her continue to believe so because it seemed the simplest way of concealing his real identity. Besides, I was able to help him a little, and the pains Sunshine took to leave us alone was as helpful sometimes as it was amusing.

SMYTHE (*has kept head down, facing fire. Now turns and faces her*). And the flirtation—

BIRD. Can't you take my word that there was no flirtation? Walter, I—(*hesitates, then remembers her own grievance*) but, speaking of that sort of thing, where did Melinda Bendy get your picture?

SMYTHE. What picture? And who in the dickens is Melinda Bendy? (*Walks up.*)

BIRD (*sarcastically*). Yes, that sounds innocent enough, but—

MELINDA *enters hurriedly C. without knocking.*

MELINDA. Madame Ormand, Mr. Bright wants to know—well, I swan! (*Stares at SMYTHE.*) Ethelbert Ferdinand DeLancy, as I live! (*Takes picture from dress and walks all around him, sizing him up and comparing him with picture. He turns to face her.*) Now just stand still a minute, won't you, and let me get a good look at you?

SMYTHE (*indignantly*). Now, Bird, I don't—

MELINDA. It's sure you all right, ain't it now? But say, Ethelbert, I just must let you know that your picture flatters you like the mischief. Where is them soulful eyes, that romantic smile, that—

SMYTHE. My name's Smythe, madam.

MELINDA. Eh?

SMYTHE. What picture do you mean?

MELINDA. This! (*Hands it to him.*)

BIRD (*looks over his shoulder*). A perfect picture of you, Walter. Maybe it does flatter you a little.

MELINDA. Walter? No!—Ethelbert!

SMYTHE (*very haughtily*). May I ask where you procured this?

MELINDA. Why, sure! You can ask anything you want to, for all of me?

SMYTHE. Then where?

MELINDA (*in innocent surprise*). Why, I don't have to answer, do I?

SMYTHE. I think, for the sake of my reputation, that I have a right to insist upon an answer.

BIRD. I, too, Melinda.

MELINDA (*looking from one to another a minute*). Oho! I see! He's your beau, ain't he? Well, then, I don't mind telling you, seeing it's just as 'tis, and can't be any 'tiser, that I bought the plagued thing in a ten-cent store—paid a hull dime for it, too. (*Sits on bed, disgusted.*)

SMYTHE (*examining it closely*). I see. It's one I had taken to advertise the Sophomore play, Bird. All the prominent performers were photographed in costume and put up for sale. Don't you remember? And the part I took, you know, was the Englishman, Ethelbert Ferdinand DeLancy.

BIRD. I see.

MELINDA (*rising indignantly*). Then you ain't really Ethelbert at all?

SMYTHE. That's what I said.

MELINDA. You ain't never really been Ethelbert in all your life?

SMYTHE. No, just Smythe, always. Walter Williams Smythe.

MELINDA (*in disgust*). Humph! Can any male man ever be believed? Oh, the soulful eyes! The fascinating smile! The romantic brow! Life is a cruel, cruel deception. (*Weeps in apron.*)

BIRD. Never mind, Melinda. There's Jake, you know.

MELINDA (*taking apron from eyes, speaking brightly*). Ain't it so? There's always Jake. He ain't so terribly romantic, but I'll bet he'll wear like alpaca. But oh—oh—oh—my heart may be all right, but something inside me's badly out o' kilter. (*Sits in rocker by fire, weeps.*)

SMYTHE (*looks at her in disgust, then turns to BIRD*). I must get out and have a smoke. (*Starts C.*)

BIRD. And I must help Sunshine with her dressing. It's almost time for the ceremony now. (*Starts L.*)

SMYTHE (*at center-back*). Are you satisfied now?

BIRD. Yes. Are you?

SMYTHE (*coldly*). I'll have to think about it, Bird. This upstart Smith doesn't look any too good to me. (*BIRD looks at him fixedly a minute, then turns, walks indignantly out L., slamming door behind her. He watches her off, hand on door.*) No, this Smith doesn't look a bit good to me. (*Exits.*)

MELINDA. What a cruel, cruel world! (*Rises, picks picture from floor and, holding at arm's length, shakes fist at it.*) You're nothing but an old hypocrite; that's what you are—just a vain delusion and a snare to all good and virtuous women! (*Throws it in fireplace and stabs with poker.*) There! You deceitful old Ethelbert Ferdinand DeLancy! Take that, and that, and that, and just burn, and burn, and burn, forever and ever!

JAKE *péeps in with armful of wood, then enters slowly, looking all around, eyes and mouth wide open.*

JAKE. Lem asked me to fix up the fire for the lady, 'Lindy; but gosh all fish-hooks! Didn't look for to find you here. (*Throws wood down between bed and fireplace.*) What in the world are you doing with that poker, 'Lindy Bendy?

MELINDA. Cremating a "has-been."

JAKE (*sighs*). Well, seems like I'd rather be a "has-been" than a "never-was." (*Looks all around, listens at all doors, cautiously.*)

MELINDA (*rises, staring at him*). Now, what's up, Jake Hoover?

JAKE. Speaking of weddings—

MELINDA (*meets him center room*). Well, wa'n't nobody speaking o' weddings so far's I've heard, but—(*looks down bashfully*).

JAKE. I got something on my mind, 'Lindy.

MELINDA. For the land's sakes! You don't say. Better see a doctor, Jake Hoover, before it strikes in.

JAKE. 'Tain't doctoring I need.

MELINDA. Then what?

JAKE. Nursing.

MELINDA. Good land! Who'd you think's going to be nursing you?

JAKE. Say, 'Lindy.

MELINDA. Well. (*Pause.*) I'm listening.

JAKE. Don't you think you'd kind o' like to have one o' your own?

MELINDA. One o' what? A doctor or a nurse, or—

JAKE. A wedding.

MELINDA (*feigning great surprise*). With lots of flowers and white ribbon, and lace-paper cake, and a white dress, and a veil—

JAKE. Well, I ain't so all-fired particular 'bout any o' them things, but I'm just a raving lunatic to have—

MELINDA. What?

JAKE. A red vest and a green necktie, and—'Lindy Bendy to tie it.

MELINDA. Are you sure you mean it, Jake?

JAKE. I've kinder had a notion I meant it for twelve or thirteen years, 'Lindy, so I'm pretty sure it's solid.

MELINDA. And you won't never deceive me?

JAKE. Good land, no!

MELINDA. Nor flirt with other women?

JAKE. Not unless I lose my mind.

MELINDA. Nor get drunk?

JAKE. Nothing stronger'n sweet cider for mine, 'Lindy.

MELINDA. Nor have your picture taken under fancy romantic names to fool some silly girl?

JAKE. Cross my heart, I won't.

MELINDA. Then I guess I'll just have to say yes. You're a perfect angel, Jake Hoover.

JAKE. In these overalls? Maybe I be, but I had a different notion of angels myself. At last it's out and I'm in it. Come to my arms, oh, 'Lindy, my love!

MELINDA (*in his arms*). Ain't you romantic, though? And I'll write a piece of poetry about it—

JAKE. Oh, you needn't go to all that trouble, 'Lindy.

MELINDA. 'Sh! I hear some one. (*Hastily busies herself,*

straightening books on table. JAKE piles up his wood industriously.)

MRS. B. *enters L.*

MRS. B. Did I leave the shears in here, Madame Ormand? Oh, just you here, 'Lindy?

MELINDA (*bashfully, nodding toward JAKE, sheepishly*). Me and Jake.

MRS. B. I see. (*Walks down.*) How are you this morning, Jake?

JAKE (*turning in affected surprise*). Eh? What? Did somebody say something? (*Jumps up.*) Oh, it's you, Miss Bright. I'm fair to middling. I was so busy I didn't see you coming, and—(*Turns L., trying to whistle carelessly.*)

MRS. B. (*looking in bewilderment from one to the other*). Why, what—

MELINDA. Jake! (*He turns. She motions to him to tell MRS. B.*)

JAKE (*walks up, front of dresser*). Say, Miss Bright.

MRS. B. (*looks up from searching table*). Well.

JAKE (*walks down to front again*). Ain't women blamed curious critters?

MELINDA (*throws herself in chair front of dresser*). Oh, Jake!

MRS. B. (*looking up again*). Why, what do you mean, Jake?

JAKE (*walking back toward MELINDA, MRS. B. now on R. of table, searching*). Why, you see, you can know 'em for years and years till they're old and gray and toothless (*MELINDA grows angry*) and like 'em as hard as a mule can kick all the time, but never let on, and then, all of a sudden, you bristle up your feathers, and—there you be!

MRS. B. I don't understand. You mean—(*looks from him to MELINDA*).

JAKE. This. (*Steps behind MELINDA's chair, lays hand on shoulder, stands straight and stiff, other hand in front of coat. She folds hands primly on lap. Country photographer old-fashioned pose. He nods to reflection in mirror.*)

MRS. B. (*following his nod*). I see. And I'm just as

glad as you are. (*Shakes hands with each and they bow repeatedly, smiling radiantly.*)

JAKE. I better go and tell Lem now. (*Starts C., keeps looking back at MELINDA, with silly grin, very reluctant to go. At C. turns back, throws kiss. After exit, opens door, sticks head in, throws kiss, etc., ad lib.*)

MELINDA. Who'd ever have believed Jake had so much poetry about him? Ain't he just the best ever? I must go see how my dinner's cooking. Want a right swell wedding supper for Sunny, don't we? (*Exits C.*)

MRS. B. (*still searching, picks up STAR's photograph from dresser*). I wonder what there is about Madame Ormand that reminds me of Star. Star was just a little girl in short dresses, with bows in her hair yet, but there's something—oh, everything makes me think of Star these days: I do wish I could see her eyes without those glasses. (*Puts down picture.*) I can't find those shears anywhere. (*Looks around, then starts L.*)

STAR enters C.

STAR. Can I help you, Mrs. Bright?

MRS. B. No. I was only looking for the shears. I must have left them somewhere else.

STAR (*goes table, searching*). Let me see. (*Pause.*) It must be hard to have your little girl married off so young, Mrs. Bright?

MRS. B. (*following to table*). Hard? Oh, you can't realize how hard. I don't dare stop to think of it, or I'd break right down.

STAR. Why do you permit it?

MRS. B. (*sinks chair, front dresser*). You don't know her father, Madame Ormand, or you wouldn't need to ask. There's no permit about it. It's all submit.

STAR. Is she your only child?

MRS. B. I—I—(*rises, trembling, and searches dresser-top nervously*). I fear so, Madame Ormand. Yes, I—I—think so. Here are the shears now. I must hurry or Sunny will be late getting dressed. (*At door L.*) I had

another girl once, and the loss of her almost broke my heart. (*Exits L.*)

STAR (*follows with arms outstretched*). Mother! Mother! (*Pauses at door.*) No, no! Not yet! Not yet! (*Leans outstretched arms on closed door, bows head on them and sobs. After pause goes C., throws hall door wide open.*) I thought I heard a familiar step. (*Looks out in each direction.*) Mr. Smith said Arthur would pass here in a few minutes. I must see him. (*Sits bed, watching through open door anxiously.*) There he comes now. No, that is that funny Mr. Hoover. (*JAKE passes through hall from R. to L., looks slyly in as he passes.*) If I can only keep from making an open scene and shattering poor mother's nerves completely. There he is! (*Jumps up, stands back, watching.*) Ah, I'd know that step among a million. Yes, it is he at last—face to face again after all these years. (*WESTCOTT reaches door from R.*) Mr. Westcott.

WESTCOTT (*surprised, but polite*). Yes.

STAR. Won't you step inside a moment, please? I'd like just a few words with you in private.

WESTCOTT *enters slowly, as if mystified.*

WESTCOTT. With me? I don't understand.

STAR (*closes door behind him, locks it, then turns key in door L.*). Yes, Mr. Pulver, with you. (*Walks to dresser.*)

WESTCOTT (*instantly anxious*). My name's Westcott.

STAR. Yes?

WESTCOTT (*nervously walking toward her*). Who are you?

STAR (*removes glasses, faces him*). Just—

WESTCOTT (*staggering backward*). Star Bright!

STAR (*alarmed*). Hush! (*Goes L. door, listens, then walks back.*)

WESTCOTT. Charmed to meet you again, I'm sure. You look lovelier than ever after all these years, blessed if you don't. You've not got a kiss for me, have you? (*Advances toward her.*)

STAR (*steps back, repels him with hand*). Back!

WESTCOTT (*backs to position right of table*). Oh, very well. I wasn't crazy about it at all. But what brought you back here? How dared you come? Why—

STAR. I came for two purposes, Arthur—to claim my rights and to save my sister.

WESTCOTT. Now, what are you driving at?

STAR. You know well enough. I mean that this farce of a wedding shall never be staged.

WESTCOTT. Who's to prevent it?

STAR. I am. You shall not ruin that little girl's life as you ruined mine.

WESTCOTT. I didn't ruin your life. You have name, fame, fortune and favor. What more does any woman want? You could never have won it but for me. Why, you should thank me.

STAR. Thank you? Was it your fault that I did not sink lower and lower to the very depths of woman's greatest degradation? Was it your fault that there was that within me that defied the power of even your wickedness, and would not be crushed out of me?

WESTCOTT (*sarcastically*). Gee! They've made an Al tragedy actress out of you, all right, all right. I didn't think it was in the silly little fool that followed me so meekly.

STAR. You never knew that little fool, Arthur. Now she comes back to warn you to—

WESTCOTT. Well, out with it. To what?

STAR. Go quietly away.

WESTCOTT. Play the quitter? Never. Too good a game.

STAR. Then I shall—

WESTCOTT. What?

STAR. Tell them the truth.

WESTCOTT. Bosh! You wouldn't dare.

STAR. I dare anything—to save my sister.

WESTCOTT. And do you think you will save her after all your high tragedy?

STAR. I know I shall. (*He laughs scornfully*).

WESTCOTT. Sounds good, all right—exciting, you know

—melodramatic and all that, but—it won't work. (*Walks door C., turns key.*)

STAR (*following him*). You refuse to go?

WESTCOTT. Certainly. I'm enjoying myself here altogether too much to tear myself away in the very hour of my triumph. You're crazy. (*Opens door.*)

STAR. Then you give me leave to—

WESTCOTT (*with low, mocking bow*). Do your worst, madam. I defy you. (*Exits.*)

STAR (*drops to lounge*). I hoped he would listen to reason. I might have known him better—but still—(*knock door L., she jumps up.*)

SUNSHINE (*out L., tries to open-door*). Madame! May we please come in to your mirror? (STAR *hastily turns key, rushes to dresser, resuming glasses, then hurries to fireplace.*) We can't see quite all there is of me in mine.

STAR (*drops in rocker by fire*). Certainly. Come right in. (*Grabs book.*)

BIRD *enters L. with SUNSHINE, leads her to glass.*

BIRD. Too bad to bother you, Madame, but that little dinky mirror of hers is no use in the world when one comes to drape a wedding veil—

STAR (*over shoulder*). No bother at all, girls. Make yourselves perfectly at home.

SUNSHINE (*at mirror*). Isn't she dear? (*Studies reflection.*) It is a pretty gown, isn't it?

BIRD. Superb! And I only wish I could feel sure that you would always be happy in it.

SUNSHINE. And you, too, Bird. I never told you how fine I think Mr. Smith is, nor how I do hope your lives together will be bright. He's just a splendid man, I think, and you ought to be so proud of him, and so happy.

BIRD (*sighs*). Oh, I don't think anyone can ever catch happiness in this world. Everybody chases her, of course, but it's only to be disappointed. Turn around a minute, please. Is that straight, Madame?

STAR (*over shoulder*). Perfectly. (*Pretends to resume book.*)

SUNSHINE. Oh, Bird! Surely everybody must catch up with her sometimes, and hold her close, close in the heart for a little while. I'd be so afraid of life if I didn't think that. Why, I—I—I've always been happy till—

BIRD. You don't want to marry Mr. Westcott, do you? Come, look at me—right in the eyes, Sunshine Bright—and own up.

SUNSHINE. Why, I—I don't think I wanted to be married at all yet, Bird—to anybody. I'm just a girl, you know, and I thought I wanted to try my wings a little before I had to be a full-grown woman. (*Sighs.*) But it must be best, or else it wouldn't have to be. (*Looks down, picks thread from skirt.*)

BIRD (*stands back, hands on hips, surveying SUNSHINE*). Well, I guess it's all right now. You look as lovely as a fairy princess—however they look. We'll go back now and get the slippers and flumadiddles. Isn't she sweet, Madame?

STAR (*rising and facing them*). As fair as a lily, and please God she may always remain so. (*SUNSHINE meets her eyes and tries to speak, but chokes with emotion. STAR follows to door, watching till door closes, then crosses to fireplace, standing behind chair.*) She does not love him. I was determined to make sure of that. I feared her heart might have to suffer, but she is mercifully spared the grief that shattered mine. (*Sits.*) I see many things now. "We who are strong have to bear the infirmities of the weak." I have always felt that there must be some divine purpose in my sorrow and suffering—yes, even in my sin—and now I know what it was. I was to suffer all that bitterness to save my little sister from a similar fate. It is the price all strong souls pay for their strength. They must bear the burdens of the weak. (*Rises.*) Yes, for the first time in my life I can say I am glad for all that has happened—glad I was able to bear the cross for her sake. And my love for him, unworthy though he seems, has yet lifted me up and helped to make me strong and true as all great souls should be.

BRIGHT (*out C.*). Sunshine! Sunshine! Are you ready?

STAR *throws door C. open.* BRIGHT *enters, closely followed by* WESTCOTT *and* SMITH.

BRIGHT. Excuse me, madam, but I must get my daughter—

SUNSHINE *enters L., followed by* BIRD, *supporting* MRS. B.

SUNSHINE. Here I am, papa. I am—ready. (SUNSHINE and BRIGHT *face each other center.* BIRD and MRS. B. *front of lounge.* SMITH *by hall-tree.* STAR, *foot of bed.* WESTCOTT, *back of* BRIGHT, *at his left.*)

BRIGHT. Come on, then.

STAR (*coming forward*). Stop, Mr. Bright. This marriage cannot be. (*General consternation.*)

BRIGHT. And why not, madam?

STAR. I forbid it. (WESTCOTT *hangs head.*)

BRIGHT. You? (*Looks from her to* WESTCOTT.) What do you mean?

STAR. This man is married already.

SUNSHINE. What?

STAR. I am his wife.

ALL. His wife?

WESTCOTT (*suddenly facing her, shaking fist*). It is a lie! (*Raises arm.*)

SMITH (*comes up behind him, catches arm and lowers it*). Strong language, old fellow. And you're in wrong this time. It is not a lie. (STAR *sits arm of rocker.* BIRD *leads* MRS. B. *to lounge and seats her carefully.* BRIGHT *stands head of lounge.* SUNSHINE *at left of table, rests hands on table and listens.*)

WESTCOTT. And who in the devil are you?

SMITH. Who I am makes no difference. It's *what* I am that counts.

WESTCOTT. Then what—

SMITH. Curb your curiosity, sir. I know you're crazy to know all about me, but my business is with this poor father and mother who have been so cruelly deceived. Mr. Bright, I am not a minister. Mrs. Bright, I am not a doctor. Westcott, my bright boy, I am not even a phonograph salesman. What I *am* is a private detective, and I've been

on the trail of this so-called Arthur Westcott for years—just to keep him out of this very brand of mischief.

WESTCOTT (*to STAR*). This is all your work, damn you! (*She bows and smiles.*)

SMITH (*to BRIGHT*). You have known of him before, sir. He didn't always call himself Westcott. Once he was just plain Arthur Pulver, with a moustache—(*pantomimes twisting one*) oh, my! And a silk hat and a swing. (*Pantomimes fashionable swagger.*) Dear me!

BRIGHT (*staring at him*). Pulver! (*MRS. B. screams. BIRD sits by her.*)

SMITH. Called himself an actor, then, I believe, instead of a painter—never saw any of his pictures, did you? And—well, Mr. Bright, when he enticed your daughter to give up her happy home for him, with the promise of launching her on the stage, he bribed a man to pose as a clergyman and sham a marriage ceremony. Fortunately for your daughter, he didn't use his usual discretion in picking out his man, and—well, to be brief, a legal license was procured from the proper authorities and the knot securely tied by a man who had the right. Your daughter Star was legally married to this man. (*Motions and STAR comes forward, laying off glasses.*)

BRIGHT and MRS. B. (*together*). Star!

SUNSHINE (*dancing to her*). Star Bright! Star Bright!

STAR. Yes, father, mother, it is all true; and to save Sunshine I have even dared to brave your anger and come home. (*BRIGHT turns away.*)

SUNSHINE (*embracing STAR*). I've always expected something perfectly wonderful to happen to me sometime. Every morning I have thought, "Maybe it will happen today." And now it's happened—it's happened. (*Leads STAR to BRIGHT.*) Papa, you must forgive her. (*He looks down, shaking head.*)

MRS. B. Oh, Lemuel, for my sake, if not for hers. Let me—(*rises, pleading*).

BRIGHT (*holds out arms to STAR*). I'm just a vile worm of the dust, but—Star! Star! (*She goes to him, he em-*

braces her, then places her in MRS. B.'s arms and blows nose vigorously.)

MRS. B. At last!

SUNSHINE (*runs to BIRD and embraces her enthusiastically*). Oh, Bird!

BIRD. She'll get well now. (*Nods to MRS. B.*)

SMITH (*to WESTCOTT*). Don't you think you'd better make tracks for the woods, old fellow. Things here won't taste good any longer. (*WESTCOTT bows low with mock politeness.*)

WESTCOTT. With pleasure. (*Starts C., speaks over shoulder to STAR*). You'll get what's coming to you for this, my lady.

SMITH. Well, I like that. Don't I get any credit at all? Come along, sir. (*Escorts WESTCOTT out C.*)

BRIGHT. "As a man soweth"—

BIRD. And now, when I go back to college, I'll keep thinking—(*walks up toward BRIGHT and MRS. B.*)

BRIGHT. Sunshine shall go with you, Miss Denton.

SUNSHINE. Oh, papa! (*Jumps up and down*). Do you—

BRIGHT. I usually mean what I say, young lady.

MRS. B. Oh, Lemuel! Can you mean it?

BRIGHT (*laying hand on her shoulder tenderly*). Honor Bright.

MRS. B. (*smiling at him*). Thank you.

SUNSHINE (*dances down left front*). This must be the day when all our dreams come true. College! The sweet white rose on the highest tree of all my thoughts and wishes—the goal of every wandering fancy—the air castle where all my noblest hopes and aims have been born and nourished to life. Am I really, truly going to realize it—so soon? (*Runs up to BRIGHT.*) Papa, you are the very best and kindest father in all the world, and I shall bless you every day and every hour for this greatest gift of life.

BRIGHT (*holding her in arms*). There, there, Sunny. Don't say too much. I—I—I'm just a vile worm—

SUNSHINE. No such thing. You're a bright purple butterfly, with pure gold on your wings. So there!

BRIGHT. Besides, it's mostly Star that's worked the miracle for you—

SUNSHINE (*running to her*). Dear, golden Star of Love. What a splendid family I did have the luck to be born in, didn't I? (*Embracing STAR.*)

MRS. B. And you have made me so happy, Lemuel. I haven't a thing left to wish for in all the world.

BRIGHT (*wipes eyes slyly*). I didn't know what joy it was to make other folks glad, I guess. I might have begun years ago if I had.

SMITH and SMYTHE *enter arm in arm.*

SMYTHE (*crosses to BIRD*). I have just had a long talk with this Smith, Bird, and he has explained the whole situation perfectly. I was a fool to be so jealous of you, but things certainly did look suspicious to a fellow all in the dark. Is it all right now, Bird?

BIRD. More than all right, Walter. It's perfectly heavenly. Sunshine. (*SUNSHINE comes down to them.*) You haven't met my fiancé yet. Permit me to introduce Mr. Walter Williams-Smythe—S-m-y-t-h-e—not Smith. (*SMYTHE bows over SUNSHINE'S hand, extended in bewildered surprise.*)

SUNSHINE (*turning to SMITH*). Then you are not Bird's lover at all?

SMITH. Not guilty. She never liked the color of my hair, nor the way I spell my name. I am William Walker Smith—S-m-i-t-h—not Smythe.

SUNSHINE. Oh, isn't it strange how things happen? And aren't we all happy? And isn't this just the best old world that ever was? Why don't everybody dance?

SMITH (*with look over shoulder of mock fear of BRIGHT*). Dance? 'Sh! Have you forgotten—

Enter PARSON WILLIAMS.

MRS. B. The minister.

PARSON. Miss Bendy said you were all here. Are you to have the ceremony in this room?

BRIGHT (*embarrassed*). I'm sorry, Brother Williams, but—

Enter JAKE hurriedly, MELINDA on arm.

JAKE. Say, Parson, me and 'Lindy want to get tied up right off quick. Being as there don't seem to be no other hitching going on here today, we 'lowed as how mebbe you'd fix it up for us right now a little cheaper than ordinary, and—and—what you say, Parson?

PARSON (*surprised*). But the license—

JAKE. Great snakes! I've got the papers! (*Fishes license from pocket, with much elaborate ceremony, and hands it proudly to PARSON, who puts on glasses and examines paper very carefully.*) Always keep 'em right in my clothes, 'cause I never could tell just when luck might take a turn my way. Been a-gittin' 'em renewed as fast as they run out ever sence I fust sot eyes on 'Lindy, and now—say, you will give us a bargain, won't you, Parson, now you're all fixed and ready for business?

PARSON (*looks around group with puzzled expression*). Why—er—if nobody else has any—

BRIGHT. Go right ahead, Brother Williams.

BIRD. Yes, we'll all give our consent.

JAKE (*aside to PARSON*). Tie it tight, Parson. (*Aloud.*) Come, 'Lindy, don't keep the Parson waiting. (*Takes position for ceremony as curtain falls.*)

CURTAIN.

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Act II.—The plotting of the Hawkes. Madame makes a new will. Mammy Judy deserted at the altar. "Ober 'leben dollars spent and not eben one cream-colored kiss." The death of Madame. The burning of the will. "The Charteris fortune belongs to me."

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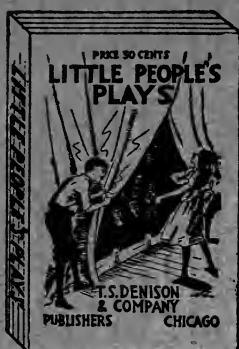
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